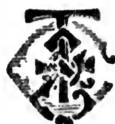
HEBREW IDEALS

FROM THE STORY OF THE PATRIARCHS

PART SECOND

GEN. 25-50



Rev. James Strachan, M.A.

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of the patriarchs

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Part Second
(GEN. 25-50)

BY

JAMES STRACHAN

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TO

MY MOTHER

PREFACE.

THE purpose of this study was indicated in the first part. The main portion of Genesis was probably written in the ninth or the eighth century B.C. I assume that it mirrors the period to which it belongs. It is true to the highest moral sentiments of the age. It faithfully represents the supreme type of excellence to which the best men were then tending. It is in harmony with their beliefs, feelings, aspirations. It is written to take possession of human life, to make certain great ideals current, to commend the highest principles of action and rules of conduct. At the same time it does not so much recount the acts of human beings, as reveal the thoughts of a Divine Intelligence bent on the regeneration of the world. Its one Hero is God.

It is not my purpose to get *behind* the narratives in Genesis. That the traditions themselves have a history is certain. Genesis contains traces of primitive belief and practice which the moral sense was discarding. The Book itself has nothing to do with these but to transcend them. They could not bear the light of a growing revelation. Their vitality was gone, their very meaning was forgotten. They are outside the range of this study. 'Everything which survived in Israel merely as a custom that was not understood, may claim an interest from the point of view of archeology and the history of religion in general, but has, strictly speaking, none so far as the religion and theology of the Bible are concerned.'[1]

[1] Prof. Kautzsch.

But the ideals of Genesis are for all time. The conflict of our age is not so much between faith and science, as between old knowledge and new. The elemental things of life—faith and hope and love—are essentially the same to-day as they were a thousand years before the coming of Christ. 'Let the world progress as much as it likes, let all branches of human research develop to their utmost, nothing will take the place of the Bible—that foundation of all culture and all education.'[1] 'The Bible reflects to-day, and will reflect for ever, every wave of human emotion, every passing event of human life—reflect them as faithfully as it did to the great and simple people in whose great and simple tongue it was written. The Bible is going to be eternal.'[2]

J. S.

[1] Goethe. [2] Watts-Dunton.

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HEBREW IDEALS.

I.

BIRTHRIGHT.

GEN. XXV. 12–34.

'We barter life for pottage, sell true bliss . . .
Then wash with fruitless tears our faded crown.'—KEBLE.

HISTORY.—The second half of the Patriarchal Story contains 'the generations' of Ishmael (25^{12}), of Isaac (25^{19}), of Esau ($36^{1.\ 9}$), and of Jacob (37^{2}). The generations were the family history of these men. They might be short or long. In the case of Ishmael they are compressed into half a dozen verses; and in the case of Esau they are little more than a genealogical tree. The sons of Ishmael and Esau, Arabs and Edomites, did little to further the providential purpose of God—the education and salvation of the human race. Their history, if expanded, might have interested antiquarians, but would scarcely have benefited mankind in general. Ishmael, as we read, had villages and encampments, princes and nations (25^{16}), but—at least not till a much later time—neither seers nor poets nor saints. Edom was rich enough in dukes and kings ($36^{15.\ 31}$), but they contributed nothing to the world's real wealth. The sons of Ishmael and Edom lived their eager lives and went their way, and their simple

generations have the pathetic brevity of an inscription on a tombstone. But the generations of Isaac and Jacob are written on a different scale; for among the descendants of Isaac and Jacob are found those leaders of men whose inspired words and heroic deeds have largely shaped the destinies of our race. Israel's appointed task was to conceive those ideals which are still the creative principles of the moral and religious life of nations. His history is the richest part of our spiritual heritage.

PRAYER.—The children of Isaac and Rebekah are regarded as children of prayer, born a score of years after their parents' marriage, given because they are asked. 'Isaac entreated the Lord . . . and the Lord was entreated of him" (25^{21}). The word used here for prayer (*'athar*, from which comes our *attar* of roses) is a very interesting one. It had at first a purely physical sense; it suggested to the mind a cloud of fragrant smoke rising up from earth to heaven. The offering of incense—originally the smoke of sacrifice and later aromatic perfumes—was associated, almost identified, with prayer. It was a silent, anthropomorphic form of propitiation. The ascending cloud was either the vehicle or the symbol of petition. In the growth and progress of Hebrew worship the physical always receded as the spiritual advanced. Enlightened minds learned to separate realities from signs. The name preserved the original idea; prayer was still set forth before God *as* incense,[1] and the golden bowls of incense were called the prayers of the saints.[2] But as soon as God was known as a spiritual Being, prayer was understood as a spiritual act—man's utterance of the longings of his heart to God, who heard and answered his cry.

ORACLES.—When Rebekah was about to become a mother, her thoughts turned to God. 'She went to inquire of the LORD' (25^{22}). She did what any devout Hebrew was in the habit of doing in time of anxiety—she goes to a holy place where

[1] Ps. 141^{2}. [2] Rev. 5^{8}.

a seer gave counsel and comfort in God's name. 'Beforetime in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, thus he spake, Come, and let us go to the seer: for he that is now called a prophet was beforetime called a seer.'[1] Other ancient peoples besides the Hebrews had shrines where oracular responses were given to troubled minds, but often given in words of studied ambiguity. Such an institution as that of prophecy—speaking for God—was liable to abuse anywhere. Its benefits depended on the character of the persons by whom the responses were given. There were lying prophets among the Hebrews; but there were also true men who, guided by the Spirit of God, delivered messages which were in accordance with the Divine mind. This was indeed the unique thing among the Hebrews, that there arose a wonderful succession of seers and prophets who were really called and qualified to speak to the perplexed in the name of the true and living God—men to whom 'were committed the oracles of God.'[2]

SOVEREIGNTY.—We are told that Jacob was predestined to be greater, and to have a greater name, than Esau. The prediction refers not to individuals but to nations. 'The one people shall be stronger than the other people' (25^{23}). 'The children being not yet born, neither having done anything good or bad, . . . it was said to Rebekah, The elder shall serve the younger.'[3] Esau as a person never served Jacob as a person, but the descendants of Esau served the descendants of Jacob. The relative position of the two nations was in accordance with the will of God. That God has a hand in the affairs of this world; that there is 'a Divinity that shapes our ends'; that God does His pleasure in the army of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth,[4] were facts early and indelibly impressed upon the minds of the Hebrews. While these were high mysteries to them, they were also practical and priceless truths. 'The purpose of God according to election'[3] was seen running all through

[1] 1 Sam. 9^{9}. [2] Rom. 3^{2}. [3] Rom. 9^{11}. [4] Dan. 4^{35}.

human life. He who makes one star differ from another in glory makes one man excel another in natural endowments. Some who bear His image have more strength, beauty, talent, power than others. Some are predestined to a higher and a harder service than others. One son has the stronger arm, another the larger brain. God divides 'to every man severally even as He will.'[1] The Hebrew belief in Divine sovereignty is entirely different from fatalism. Those who hold it hold also that every man's will is left absolutely free; that God is good unto all; that He condemns no man to be, still less to remain, a sinner; and that to all who faithfully serve Him, whether with greater or lesser talents, He gives rewards which are infinitely satisfying.

CHARACTER.—Children of the same family, twins as well as others, often have the most diverse, apparently antipathetic, temperaments. Esau and Jacob were contrasts from the first, and as they grew up the differences between them became more and more marked. Esau was a high-spirited, careless, roving lad; impatient of control; swift to take offence, but frank and ready to forgive; surging with strong passions and quick emotions; always swayed by the impulse of the passing moment. He followed his natural bent when he became 'a cunning hunter, a man of the field' (25^{27}). He loved the thrill, the dash, the sensation of the chase, and the keen-scented air of the mountain, the forest, the desert. Excitement, adventure, danger, escapades of every kind, the view-halloo and the death-cry, were life to him. His joy was to start off at sunrise and return at night laden with the spoils of a noble hunt. To scour the fields for the prey, to lure it into his net, or transfix it with arrow or spear, was legitimate 'cunning.' He liked the sport for its own sake, but it added to his pleasure that he was able to give a haunch of savoury venison to his aged father. So much did he live in the open air, that the old man said his very garments had a smell of the hunting-

[1] 1 Cor. 12^{11}.

fields (27^{27}). The Hebrews were never lacking in admiration of physical strength, agility, daring; and the sportsman had an undisputed place in a land abounding with the wild creatures of the chase. Ruddy, shaggy, brawny, fearless and impetuous, Esau was an ideal huntsman. But there was a serious flaw in his character. So much did he enjoy the warm, sensuous, earthy side of things, that he had no thought of the awakening of the soul. He was a 'profane person,'[1] not in the sense of taking God's name in vain,—there is no suggestion of that,—but in the sense of never feeling and recognising God's claims upon him at all.

Young Jacob's disposition and habits are entirely different. Quiet, wary, home-loving, he is evidently called by nature to the peaceful occupations of the pastoral life. He is quite content to follow slow-moving flocks from field to field and well to well. He never, if he can help it, strays far from the tent and the pasture-ground. Timid and diffident, he shrinks from too close contact with his rough, impulsive brother, and runs away rather than stand up face to face with him if by chance they come to a serious difference. Clever and ambitious, and well aware that he is not able to match strength with strength, he does not scruple to do it with cunning—a cunning of a very different kind from Esau's. Keenly alive to his own interest, and not above taking a mean advantage of another's weakness, he lets this subtle, secretive, slippery characteristic grow until he becomes a master of intrigue. But he has redeeming qualities. Chaste and temperate, he can deny himself a present gratification for the sake of a future good. He knows how to labour and to wait. And he is awed by the thought that there is another world above this one. Things unseen and spiritual are very real to him. The purposes and promises of God captivate his imagination. Visions beckon and voices call him to a life of fellowship with God. He reverently feels that he ought to walk by faith rather than by sight.

[1] Heb. 12^{16}.

Affection.—Some minds are attracted to one another by affinity, others by contrast. 'Isaac loved Esau,' who was his opposite; and 'Rebekah loved Jacob,' who was her image (25^{28}). In spirit and manner of life Esau presented the most striking unlikeness to his father. The one was at home in strenuous action, the other in quiet meditation. Isaac was not more gentle, placid, retiring than Esau was fierce, bold, intrepid. Yet Isaac was irresistibly drawn to the hot, impulsive youth, seeing in him all that he missed in himself. He listened with delight to the huntsman's tales of adventure. The breathless pursuit, the hazardous encounter, the hairbreadth escapes stirred his imagination. He felt that his son's noble stature and restless energy were prophetic of future greatness.

Jacob, on the other hand, was Rebekah's favourite. Mother and son were drawn to each other by strong affinities. She saw in his patience, his self-control, his spiritual leanings, the promise of great and good things. She hoped much from his mother-wit —the cleverness he inherited from herself. She was the readiest of teachers, he the aptest of pupils. In many ways he was happy, in some not so happy, in having such a mother, who fostered in his mind the love of high things, and stirred him to act a great, if not always a noble, part. Her influence over her son in the formative years of his life was incalculable. Mothers have shaped the characters of the men who have moulded the destinies of nations. A true 'mother in Israel' was always greatly revered, and a nation's ideal of motherhood is the measure of its greatness. In modern times Napoleon said of his country, 'What France needs for her regeneration is mothers.' It is the world's need. Tennyson, depicting a young man's home privileges, says:

> 'Happy he
> With such a mother! faith in womanhood
> Beats with his blood, and trust in all things high
> Comes easy to him, and though he trip and fall
> He shall not blind his soul with clay.'

Fear.—The story of Esau selling his birthright is one of the most striking and impressive tales in the Bible. The narrator's sympathy makes the figures of a bygone age live before our eyes to-day. He knows both how to tell a story in simple dramatic language, and when to stop and let the reader's imagination do the rest. The old-world tale has a moral for every conscience. It not only stirs our hearts to pity for another's fall, but arouses us to a sense of the possibilities of disaster in our own lives. Every thoughtful reader feels that he may become another Esau ; and wholesome fear is one of the principal elements in moral education. The facts are stated without comment, but each of us seems to hear a chorus saying, '*Mutato nomine, de te fabula narratur* : Change only the name, and *you* are the person of whom the story is told.'

Birthright.—Esau, in virtue of being a few minutes older than Jacob, was Isaac's natural heir. He had the rights of primogeniture, and believed that no man could wrest them from him. If ever he parted with them, it could only be by an act of his own free will. We see that he was highly favoured. For one thing, the eldest son of Hebrew parents received a double portion of his father's property to enable him to maintain the family honour and dignity.[1] For another thing, Esau's birthright meant more than an ordinary firstborn son's privilege. He was in a unique position, which afforded him brilliant prospects and golden opportunities. He was born to an inheritance which all the world's wealth would not buy. To be in the patriarchal succession with Abraham and Isaac, to be the recipient of great and precious promises, to be the founder of a holy nation, to be the minister of a covenant by which all the families of the earth were to be blessed,—this was within his reach. But his eyes had never been opened to the worth of spiritual possessions. He spoke of 'this birthright' with frank contempt. A thing so high and ideal aroused no enthusiasm in his mind. On the other hand, he had never learned to curb his violent passions.

[1] Deut. 21[17].

One day when he returned home after an unsuccessful hunt he was proved to be the slave of appetite. Faint and famished, he was tempted to sell his birthright for a mess of pottage—a steaming dish of lentil soup. The idea did not shock him, partly because he had long despised his birthright, and partly because the pangs of hunger make him utterly reckless. At any cost his voracious appetite[1] must be appeased. If his brother covets his birthright, let him have it, and much good may it do him! Let the future take care of itself. Birthright or no birthright, Esau must have his supper. And with a fine heady recklessness, an exultant sense of doing a thing worthy of his manhood, an exhilarating consciousness of escaping from the meshes of spiritual bondage, Esau barters his birthright. We see that he will regret his bargain, but not yet. His hunger is keen, the lentils are delicious, and with a light heart he eats and drinks and goes his way (25^{34}). He does not know that in despising his birthright he is despising God. He has come to one of those critical moments in life which are fatal to us all if we have no guide to conduct except desire. He is illustrating 'that inexorable law of human souls, that we are preparing ourselves for sudden deeds by the reiterated choice of good or evil that gradually determines character.'[2]

FAITH.—If Esau sold his birthright, so may we sell ours. Heirs of all the ages, who cannot exaggerate the grandeur of our privileges, we may forfeit our highest good. 'All the ability of the present, all the contributions of the past, all the hopes of the future'[3] are ours, and we may lose our title to them. Every man who lives below his true self, who prefers pleasure to duty, who lets the clamorous wants of the body drown the voice of the soul, who is too impatient to wait for God, sells his birthright. For a mess of savoury red pottage Esau's birthright was sold. For a handful of glittering red earth, for a glass of sparkling

[1] 'Feed me' (25^{30}) means 'let me devour'—like a wild beast.
[2] George Eliot. [3] Emerson.

red wine, for a strip of bright red ribbon, for a kiss of smiling red lips, many birthrights have been sold. 'I saw, moreover, in my dream,' said Pilgrim, 'Passion seemed to be much discontent, but Patience was very quiet. . . . Passion will have all now, this year, that is to say, in this world; so are the men of this world: they must have all their good things now, they cannot stay for their portion of good. That proverb, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," is of more authority with them than are all the Divine testimonies of the good world to come.' Indifference to the high and sacred things of life, 'the malady of not wanting,' the refusal to sacrifice a solid-seeming reality for a visionary ideal, is the explanation of many moral tragedies.

> 'The world is too much with us; late and soon,
> Getting and spending, we lay waste our powers:
> We have given our hearts away, a sordid boon!' [1]

'With the generality of men, ingenuity, strength, and skill do but imply that the soul must first of all be banished from their life, that every impulse that lies too deep must be carefully brushed aside.' [2] Only Faith saves us from this fatal error,—faith which realises the sacredness of life, grasps the promises of God, and constrains us to hold fast our fellowship with Him as our chief good.

RESPONSIBILITY.—At a later time, when it dawned upon Esau that he had made an ill bargain, he bitterly complained of the conduct of his selfish, designing brother. Jacob, he said, had overreached him—had taken away his birthright (27^{36}). And certainly Esau had just cause of complaint. With a bitter jest he said his brother was rightly called Jacob—supplanter [3] (v.^{36}). It is cruel to drive a hard bargain with a faint and hungry man, all the more if he is a brother. When a buyer knows the

[1] Wordsworth. [2] Maeterlinck.

[3] Compare Cromwell's shrewd characterisation of a well-known historical figure as 'Sharp of that ilk.'

true value of a thing which the seller despises, it is mean to take advantage of the other's ignorance. Jacob's conduct was unbrotherly and ungenerous. But this is only a part of the truth. Jacob did not injure Esau half so much as Esau wronged himself. It is impossible to absolve a man from the responsibility of his actions. Esau rejected his own true good. If he was punished, it was not for a solitary act of rashness committed in a moment of overmastering impulse. The selling of his birthright simply gathered up his whole past life into a single definite act, and embodied his character. It was not Jacob's plotting that was his undoing, but his own passion. 'He took away my birthright,' Esau bitterly cried. But, in truth, Esau himself, with his own hand,

> 'Like the base Judean, threw a pearl away
> Richer than all his tribe.'

TRAGEDY.—Sometimes 'the story of Jacob and Esau has been read as reflecting the historical relations of the peoples Israel and Edom, and their respective characters. If so, the historian who depicted his own people as crafty, unscrupulous, and godly, and their bitterest enemy as the careless, noble, natural man, was a humorous satirist of the highest rank. Historically the satire must be judged less than just to his own people, and more than partial to Edom.'[1] But neither Esau nor Jacob can be regarded as a mere epitome of racial characteristics. A really creative literary power does not produce types but persons, who may or may not be afterwards seen to be the representatives of a class or people. The tragic hero of the Bible, like the tragic hero of the great dramatists, has so many good qualities that he at once wins our sympathy, and so much greatness, that we are vividly conscious of the possibilities of human nature. No one ever reads the story of Esau with the feeling that this man is a poor creature. At first every reader

[1] A. B. Davidson.

greatly prefers him to his brother. It is Esau's native nobility that compels us to realise the worth of that which he misses. He is the kind of man of whom we are in the habit of charitably saying that he is nobody's enemy but his own. But, in truth, he is God's enemy, because he wastes the splendid manhood which God has given him. Passionate, impatient, impulsive, incapable of looking before him, refusing to estimate the worth of anything which does not immediately appeal to his senses, preferring the animal to the spiritual, he is rightly called a 'profane person.' 'Alas! while the body is so broad and brawny, must the soul lie blinded, dwarfed, stupefied, almost annihilated?'[1]

II.

MEEKNESS.

GEN. XXVI.

> 'Strong
> In the endurance which outwearies wrong,
> With meek persistence baffling brutal force,
> And trusting God against the universe.'—WHITTIER.

VERACITY.—The story of Isaac's sojourn in Gerar, and his attempt to deceive the king of the land (26^{1-11}), is almost identical with an earlier narrative regarding his father (20^{1-18}). There are some differences of language which indicate a difference of origin. For example, the Divine name in the earlier story is Elohim, in the later Jahveh. There is no lack of verisimilitude in the conduct ascribed to Isaac, whose life, for better or worse, was modelled on his father's example. His action in this instance is anything but heroic. He fears to acknowledge his wife. When Abimelech asks him in astonishment how he could call her his sister, he has nothing better to say than this: 'Because I said, lest I die for her.' No one will call that a

[1] Carlyle.

gallant speech. Isaac merely tries to excuse himself; of course he does not attempt to justify himself. He has done wrong and knows it. Conscience calls us to suffer when we cannot avoid suffering without sin. Some moralists have tried to defend the falsehood that is prompted by love. But such a classical instance as that of Jeanie Deans refusing to speak an untruth even to save her sister's life, will always commend itself to the moral sense. In any case, nothing can be said for the lie of base and selfish fear. Isaac could not even plead, as Abraham had feebly done, that his wife *was* his sister. He lied outright, and Abimelech reproved him with the stern accents of moral indignation. It must be admitted that there is a great deal of lying and prevarication in Genesis. But there is always some touch in the narrative which commends the true and condemns the false. The God of the Hebrews is 'the God of things as they are.' 'Veracity and the kindred virtues are essentially and immutably good, and it is impossible and inconceivable that they should ever be vices and their opposites virtues.'[1] 'They who tamper with veracity tamper with the vital forces of human progress.'[2]

GREATNESS.—Isaac figures better in the scenes which follow (26^{12-33}). When we read that 'the man waxed great, and grew more and more, until he became very great' (v.[13]), we perceive that the reference is to material greatness. Isaac is great as a landowner, a sheep-master, a well-digger, a householder. Greatness is not predicated of him in the sense in which it was ascribed to Abraham (18^{18}) and to Joseph (39^{9}). He did not become great, as they did, in the eager pursuit of a missing good, in the conflict with evil, in the bracing necessity of thinking and acting for himself. He was to a large extent what his surroundings made him. We see in him the familiar type of the great man's son, who is overshadowed by his father's greatness. His position was made too easy, his path in life too smooth. Everything was found for him. His parents planned for him,

[1] Lecky. [2] J. Morley.

Eliezer wooed for him, Esau hunted for him, and the land almost of its own accord yielded its increase for him. The result of all this kindness was that he was lacking in the qualities of a strong manhood. He could never be actively great, original, daring. But there is room in the world for many types of excellence. Enough that Isaac was from the first absolutely pure-minded, that he was meek and peaceful, that he cherished his father's lofty ideals, and that 'the LORD blessed him' (v.[12]). It was left to him to excel in the passive virtues, and in this respect he is almost matchless among the men of the Old Testament. He cultivated a gentleness which after all made him morally great.

LIBERTY.—Isaac paid the penalty of success in being envied (v.[14]), in having his rights disputed (v.[20]), and his servants molested (v.[20]). He could not but feel that his jealous neighbours hated him (v.[27]), and wished to be quit of him (vv.[16, 27]). They were painfully conscious of his superior power, and fully expected him to use it to their hurt (v.[16]). But, in truth, they had nothing to fear. So far from exercising his power offensively, Isaac did not even use it defensively. No injury could provoke him to strife. When his neighbours coveted a well which his servants had dug, he quietly surrendered it to them. 'They contended with him' (v.[20]), but he would not contend with them. Even a well of living water, infinitely valuable as it is in the East, was less precious to him than human life. Other valleys were waiting to be pierced and yield up their treasure. A second spring was opened, then coveted, and then surrendered in the same way. Isaac 'removed from thence and opened another well' (v.[22]). It takes two to make a quarrel, and he would not strive nor let others strive. He was the least aggressive of men. His placid good humour found expression in the names which he gave his wells. He did not break his heart because he could not drink out of the wells of 'Contention' and 'Enmity'; he cheerfully resigned them to those who cared for them. He was happy if he was left in peace to drink the sweet waters of 'Liberty'

(Rehoboth). 'For now,' he said, 'the LORD hath made room for us' (v.[22]). Doubtless there is a deep sigh of relief as well as a cheerful note of gratitude in his words. Broad places, green expanses, virgin solitudes, in which one can lead a restful, sheltered life, are all that he asks for. He is the religious quietist of that ancient time.

MEEKNESS.—The noblest kind of sacrifice is the self-denial of those who have the clearest rights. Isaac was again and again placed in circumstances in which others would have quickly drawn the sword. The question arises whether he surrendered too much for the sake of peace. If a man cannot waive his rights without neglecting his duty, violating his conscience, surrendering his religion, losing his self-respect, betraying the rights of others, he is bound to resist. Otherwise he may yield, and scarcely any price is too high to pay for peace. Isaac was right. He is the first example in the Old Testament of the Christian or New Testament type of excellence. After him, as the Talmud says, 'we find in the Bible many instances of the pleasure which meekness and humility in the creature afford the Creator. The noblest of our ancestors were those who were free from self-pride.' Nothing can be saner or sweeter than this ancient tale, with its apparent moral for those who think that the strongest thing is to retaliate, to assert every claim, to cede no possible advantage. 'The grandest thing in having rights is that, being our rights, we can give them up.'[1] 'Why do ye not rather take wrong?'[2]

FRIENDSHIP.—In the end Isaac is no real loser, but a great gainer, by his meekness. He disarms enmity by gentleness; he overcomes evil with good. His patience wears out the malice of his enemies. They begin to be ashamed of wronging one who absolutely refuses to take offence. Laying aside their jealousy, they at length come to seek an alliance with him.

[1] George Macdonald. [2] 1 Cor. 6[7].

With some audacity they remind him that they have always lived at peace with him (v.[29]). That is the language of diplomacy. Isaac might have something to say to it, but he forbears. He can afford to be magnanimous. It is enough that he has turned enemies into friends. That is better than to defeat them and have them as enemies still. Generosity has won the day. The policy, or rather the holy instinct, of self-sacrifice always justifies itself. Men whose hearts not so long ago burned with hatred sit down to a love-feast, and enter into a solemn covenant of peace and friendship (vv.[31. 32]). The cordial understanding between Hebrew and Philistine is assured. Grant that such alliances are not very deep-rooted, yet in a world of conflicting interests and passions everything which tends towards unity is welcome to all peace-loving men. If neighbours—men or nations—were rigidly to insist upon their rights, there might be endless war. But, happily, two things are true: mercy triumphs against justice, and the meek inherit the earth.

SONSHIP.—On the first night of Isaac's sojourn at Beersheba he had a vision. 'The LORD appeared to him, and said, I am the God of Abraham thy father; fear not, for I am with thee, and will bless thee, and multiply thy seed for My servant Abraham's sake' (26[24]). This is the first time the grand name, 'God of Abraham,' meets us in the Bible. It became very dear to the Hebrews; it was used by Christ and His apostles;[1] and it is sung in Christian hymns. The God who revealed Himself to Abraham, who was his Friend, who shaped his career and destiny, could manifest Himself under no sweeter name than this to Abraham's son. 'God of our fathers!' and 'My father's God!' can never cease to be peculiarly heart-stirring invocations. That the Being whom we are called to worship was the God of our forefathers, and made them such men as we know them to have been; that He was the God of our own father, whom we dutifully regard as the best man in the world,

[1] Matt. 22[32], Acts 3[13].

—these are strong reasons why He should also be our God, or why we should at least think a thousand times before we change our religion. It is the sorest of all trials for a young man to have to condemn his father's misbelief or unbelief by his own faith. Thrice happy are those sons and daughters whose personal religion is inextricably interwoven with their filial reverence and love.

MARRIAGE.—Esau married two daughters of Heth, called Judith and Basemath, and 'they were a grief of mind' to his parents (26^{35}), who saw that such an alliance must tend to subvert the purpose for which God sought to make the Hebrews a separate people. Esau loved, as he did everything else, impulsively and passionately, and the joyous recklessness with which love overleaps all barriers seems at first sight rather an admirable thing. Yet is it so good? Some barriers are artificial things, mere devices of men, conventions of society or whims of individuals, and no harm, but rather much good, is done when love merrily breaks them down. But other barriers are sacred, being made by God, awful laws by which His love guards us from sin and sorrow; and those who hastily break them do great wrong to society and their own souls. Esau disregarded the instruction of his father, and forsook the law of his mother, and brought upon them 'bitterness of spirit.'[1] There is no suggestion that he was ever deliberately unkind to his parents. In his own way he tried hard to please them. But when a son goes out into the world and plays the fool, that is the unkindest cut of all. A physical blow would cause far less pain. There may be no outward change in the parents' attitude —no doors closed, no upbraiding words, no privileges withheld; but there is an inward, incessant, almost insufferable heartache. 'A wounded spirit who can bear?'[2] In later times a strict law was imposed upon the Hebrews against inter-marriages with the Canaanites. 'Neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter shalt thou not give unto his son, nor

[1] Gen. 26^{35} margin. [2] Prov. 18^{14}.

his daughter shalt thou take unto thy son.'[1] That was not a hard law; it was an ordinance of love by which the Hebrews were preserved from racial absorption and spiritual death.

III.

BLESSING.

GEN. XXVII.

> 'No great system has ever yet flourished which did not present an ideal of happiness as well as an ideal of duty.'—LECKY,

READINESS.—'Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim, so that he could not see' (27^1). He was suffering from no specific ailment—nothing but the incurable disease of old age. His pulse was slow and feeble, his blood thin and cold. He was at a time of life when one does not look far forward; at any moment the silver cord might be loosed and the golden bowl broken; and he did not wish death to come and find him unready. No obligation is more imperative than that of preparing for a future which we shall never see. Through the warnings of nature, if not through the death-sentence of the physician, God says to each man in turn, 'Set thine house in order, for thou must die and not live.' And the happiness of future generations may depend to no small extent upon the dying man's last will and testament.

OLD AGE.—Isaac's last stage of all can scarcely be compared in grandeur and dignity with the latter end of Abraham and Jacob. It is, of course, far from being contemptible. Even in the physical helplessness of second childhood his mental vision is clear and strong. He is not that saddest of all figures in the world—an old man without faith. But he does not command the high veneration of his own people as the other patriarchs

[1] Deut. 7^3.

do. His sickbed is surrounded with tender devotion, and his every want lovingly supplied; but his kindred do not hesitate on occasion to take advantage of his infirmities and deceive him for their own selfish ends. Nor does his eagerness for venison, his frequent mention of the savoury meat which his soul loves, make a favourable impression upon our minds. The love of delicate fare, which he has allowed to grow upon him (25^{28}), is an infirmity which is apt to beset the indolent. There needs a more strenuous youth and a more active manhood than Isaac's to prepare for a morally grand old age.

MOTHER-LOVE.—Rebekah's words and ways are always full of interest. She is a fascinating woman, with a clever, eager, inventive mind; with a genius for laying plans and overcoming difficulties; accustomed to give orders and to be obeyed; ready to make any sacrifices for those whom she loves; but impatient of opposition, and vexed beyond measure and weary of life itself when she has to deal with things beyond her comprehension, or simply to submit to the inevitable. It is impossible to question the strength of her mother-love. When her son expresses his fear of bringing a curse upon himself, she quickly answers, 'Upon me be the curse, my son' (v.^{13}). We tremble at the audacity of her wild words. She is reckless of personal consequences if so be she can secure a coveted distinction for her son. He is dearer to her than her own soul. It is no mean advantage that she desires for him; it is a covenant blessing, a heritage of spiritual promises; and she believes it is God's will that he should obtain this privilege (25^{23}). But neither a high purpose nor a great love ever consecrates the use of dishonourable means; and Rebekah, with all her charm, must be numbered among those mothers who love not wisely but too well.

OBEDIENCE.—Rebekah was, no doubt, right in judging that her younger son had qualities which made him fitter to receive his father's blessing and inherit the covenant promises than her

elder son. But she was not right in tempting the one to deceive the other. She had an unlimited influence over her favourite son, and she exercised it to the utmost. 'My son,' she said, 'obey my voice according to all that which I command thee ; . . . only obey my voice' (vv. [8, 13]). She not only prompted and persuaded, she commanded him. We remember that Abraham commanded his children to keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment (18[19]). Rebekah commands her son to cheat. Temptation is never so strong as when it is suggested by one who loves us. A mother's affection, enlisted on the side of evil, has power to break down almost any scruples. Jacob obeys his mother, knowing well that he is doing wrong,—that he will rightly be regarded as 'a deceiver,' and likely bring upon himself 'a curse and not a blessing' (v.[12]). He obeys, and his obedience is the beginning of all his sorrows. There are exceptions to the moral law that a son should obey his parents. Disobedience for conscience' sake may be his clear and imperative duty. Parental authority, being delegated by God, must be exercised in accordance with His laws. We must obey God rather than—our parents. The secret tragedy in many a son's life turns on his knowledge of the fact that his parents wish him to do one thing and God another. Reverence, gratitude, and love pull him the one way, reverence, gratitude, and love pull him the other way. But conscience makes its voice heard, and conscience must be the guide of our lives. 'Children, obey your parents *in the Lord*.'[1]

TRUTH.—Having once entered on a course of untruthfulness, Jacob pursues it to the end with astonishing coolness. He begins with the acted lie (v.[15]), and follows it up with the lie direct (v.[19]), the lie impious (v.[20]), and the lie persistent (v.[24]). He talks of 'my venison' (v.[19]), though he probably never killed a gazelle in his life, and he says that the LORD has given him good-speed in his hunting (v.[20]), though he knows that the LORD

[1] Eph. 6[1].

has had nothing to do with it. Worst of all, he stoops down and kisses his father with the lips which have just uttered these lies. There is something appalling in the audacity with which he braves it out. Luther, trying to put himself in Jacob's place, cries out in wonder, 'For my part, I should have dropped the dish and run.' Are we to suppose that the writing which preserves this ancient tradition, the Book which was a mirror of morals and manners to the young Hebrews, approved of clever and successful lying? Quite the contrary. Whenever truth is referred to in this Book, it is regarded as an indispensable attribute of God, and a virtue loved by all good men ($24^{27. 49}$ 32^{10} 42^{16}); and whenever any man is guilty of untruthfulness, there is something in the narrative that condemns his conduct. We are not asked to admire Jacob as a supplanter. 'The writer perceives very well that his action can be described by no gentler term than that of cheating.'[1] Jacob had to become a very different man, chastened by the suffering which his untruthfulness entailed upon him, before he won by faith the prize which he sought to capture by fraud.

BLESSING.—The Blessing of Isaac, as may be seen in the Revised Version, is a little poem. The aged patriarch, kindled for an hour into prophetic ecstasy, and speaking as the oracle of God, bequeaths his benediction to his younger son, and through him to the great nation which is to spring from him. Using language at once rhythmic in its flow and poetic in its ideas, he promises his son a field which the LORD has blessed (*i.e.* the goodly land of Canaan), the dew of heaven, the fatness of the earth, abundance of corn and wine, the homage of other nations (called Israel's 'brethren,' the Hebrews and kindred races being regarded as children of a common mother), and concludes by invoking a curse upon all who curse his son (Israel as a people rather than an individual), and a blessing upon all who bless him (vv.$^{27-29}$). The words aptly describe the land of Israel and its

[1] Oort.

people in the palmy days of fruitfulness and power. No one would dream of calling the Holy Land as it is to-day a field which the LORD hath blessed. Great tracts of it strike thoughtful travellers as lying under a curse.[1] What began best has ended worst, and what was once blest has proved accursed. The beauty and bloom are gone. The foot of the Turk has blighted everything which it has touched. But the real end is not yet; and under some juster and kindlier régime the fatness and fragrance may return. There is still some virtue in the patriarch's benediction, 'God give thee of the dew of heaven.'

CANAAN.—It has sometimes been remarked, not without surprise, that the Blessing of Isaac 'seems confined to secular matters, and is such as any man of ordinary wealth and power might have pronounced on his favourite son with a view to the increase of these.'[2] The things promised are the fragrance of the field, the dew of heaven, the fatness of the earth, abundance of corn and wine, and peaceful habitations. One is led to ask whether the ideal of the charming little poem is not simply an earthly Paradise. Have not the poets of other lands depicted similar scenes?—

> 'Hills all rich with blossomed trees,
> And fields which promise corn and wine,
> And scattered cities crowning these,
> Whose far white walls along them shine.'[3]

But the truth is, that to the Hebrew believer and thinker nothing is secular; fields and dew, corn and wine and oil, are all sacred, because they are the gifts of God. While the servant of God seemed to find his 'good,' his 'life,' his 'blessing' in those things which we regard as mundane,—a peaceful heritage, fruitful fields, children's children, the love of friends, the victory over enemies,—it was not these desirable things in themselves which constituted his chief good. It was these things with the favour

[1] Kelman. [2] Chalmers. [3] Byron.

of God. The ideal was, after all, a spiritual one. It is significant that the Blessing of Esau fails in the essential thing. God's name is not found in it. Good things were promised to Esau; he obtains all that he can appreciate; and his sons enjoy it for many centuries. Even to-day the Land of Edom is in some parts very fruitful. 'Goodly streams flow through the valleys, which are filled with trees and flowers; while on the uplands to the east pasture-lands and cornfields may everywhere be seen.'[1] But for all that the Land of Edom has never been regarded as 'a field which the LORD hath blessed.' It did not enjoy the loving-kindness which is better than life, the consciousness of the Divine Presence, which is the blessing of blessings.

SENSIBILITY.—It is no wonder if Isaac is greatly agitated when he finds that he has unwittingly blessed his younger instead of his elder son. He trembles 'with an exceeding great trembling' (v.[33]). He asks in amazement what this thing can mean. Does it merely signify that there has been a conflict of human wits and wills, in which he has been worsted? He sees that there is far more in it than this. It is borne in upon him that man is playing only a minor part in this matter, and that the hand of God is in it. He suddenly realises, with a flush of shame, that he has been trying to thwart the will of God. Of course he has been trying in vain. God's will has been done after all. And then, by a swift transition, the finer side of Isaac's character appears. Weak in action, he is strong in endurance. As soon as he sees that he has simply been used to carry out the purpose of God, the feeble wilfulness of the man who has been bent on having his own way passes into the complete self-abnegation of one who is determined that God's shall be done. No one would call Isaac self-assertive, but he asserts God's will with emphasis. To the frenzied entreaties of his elder son he turns a deaf ear. Once sure of his ground, nothing can

[1] Palmer.

induce him to leave it. What he has spoken he has spoken. His soft and pliant nature, as if suddenly steeled by the touch of God, has become inflexible. Knowing God's will and his own duty, he will cleave to both without a shadow of turning. We see how wholesome is that 'exceeding great trembling,' which makes the spirit of man so wonderfully susceptible to divine impressions. Every good man has often trembled in this way, and the oftener the better; for it is in the hour of shuddering amazement that sin is discarded. 'Serve the LORD with fear, and rejoice with trembling.'[1]

DESTINY.—Esau did not despise the blessing as he had despised the birthright. He was confident of receiving it. He knew that though he had sometimes grieved his father's heart (26^{35}) he had never lost his love, and he never doubted his father's intention to bless him. He was overjoyed when the expected day at length came. He 'went to the field to hunt for venison and to bring it' (v.^{5}), and he 'came in from his hunting' with the expectant thrill which precedes the realisation of a long-cherished hope. Then came the poignant moment of disillusionment, when it flashed upon him that he had been tricked and befooled, and that the blessing was gone beyond recall. Hot tears of passion leaped to his eyes, and he cried with an exceeding great and bitter cry. Wave after wave of uncontrollable grief swept over his soul (vv.$^{34.\ 39}$), while he mingled loud reproaches of his unbrotherly brother with plaintive appeals to his father's pity. Every reader profoundly sympathises with him in his tragic sorrow, in which 'there is a deep pathos which is scarcely surpassed elsewhere even in the Bible, the most pathetic of all books.'[2] But his regrets were vain. An apostle says that 'he found no place for repentance,' which means that there was no means of undoing what he had done. 'We know that when he afterwards desired to inherit the blessing he was rejected, though he sought it diligently with

[1] Ps. 2^{11}, Phil. 2^{12}. [2] Lightfoot.

tears.'[1] Whatever the future might have in store for him the past at least was irrevocable

> 'The moving finger writes; and, having writ,
> Moves on: nor all thy piety nor wit
> Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
> Nor all thy tears wash out a word of it.'[2]

Esau's exceeding loud and bitter cry sounds the needful note of alarm in a world in which so much evil is wrought for want of thought as well as want of will. He lost the coveted blessing because he despised the birthright. 'It is in those acts called trivialities that the seeds of joy are for ever wasted, until men and women look round with haggard faces at the devastation their own waste has made, and say, The earth bears no harvest of sweetness.'[3]

RESTRAINT.—Esau was a man of simple nature and elemental passions. His anger, while it lasted, was dark and fierce, and during the mad fit it was wise to keep out of his way. 'Being wrought,' he was 'perplexed in the extreme,'[4] like another man of simple, heroic character. His impetuosity made him dangerous. But he was not a man who nursed his wrath. No one would call him sullenly vindictive. If ever he declared that he would do something desperate to an enemy, and did not do it at once, he invariably forgot that he meant to do it at all (vv.[41. 45]). He was as changeful in his hatred as in his love. He lived in the passing moment; his blood quickly boiled and quickly cooled; and he was as easily led into good as into evil. He was terribly provoked when his brother stole his father's blessing, and 'comforted himself' with the thought of killing him when his father was gone. The days of mourning were near at hand, and then he would have his revenge—indeed he would. Meantime he felt constrained to delay. The thought of his gentle father stayed his hand. He could not break that loving heart. But the delay

[1] Heb. 12[17].
[2] Omar Khayyam.
[3] George Eliot.
[4] Othello.

settled the matter. For such a man as Esau, a revenge postponed was a revenge abandoned. Moreover, Isaac's end was not yet; he was to have a long peaceful evening of life, and his quiet presence would always act like a charm to restrain his son's wild passionate nature and to foster in him feelings of kindly natural affection.

MARRIAGE.—It would not have been like Rebekah if she had not quickly seen what possibilities of good there were in her younger son's enforced flight from home. It would give him the opportunity of visiting her kindred and seeking a wife. Esau had blundered by marrying into two heathen families. His wives had tried Rebekah's spirit beyond endurance. They were a grief of mind to her (26^{35}), and she was weary of her life because of the daughters of Heth (27^{46}). Her secret dread was that Jacob might follow Esau's example, and marry women 'such as these' ($v.^{46}$). If Jacob should take a wife of the daughters of Heth,—wearily she repeats the words, 'daughters of Heth,'—will his mother's life be worth living? ($v.^{46}$). One of our English romancers has borrowed the idea which was such a nightmare to Rebekah, and made 'A Daughter of Heth' the title of a thrilling tale. He has given us the picture of a charming and pure-minded, if a very wilful and unconventional young girl—a most admirable 'heathen,' whom Rebekah would have loved with all her heart. But the daughters of Heth who vexed Rebekah's eager spirit and who 'pleased not Isaac' (28^{8}), and of whom Esau himself soon tired ($v.^{9}$), was evidently very different from Black's heroine. The heathen of real life and history present a striking contrast to the 'noble heathen' of fiction. Heathenism has never yet elevated and purified the ideal of womanhood. The Old Testament gives us many glimpses of the life of heathen women in Canaan; and if the picture appals us, we can imagine how the reality appalled Rebekah. The very existence of the Hebrews as a separate, clean, holy nation depended upon the forbidding of intermarriages with 'the heathen who knew not God.'

WOMANHOOD.—Rebekah said to Jacob when he was leaving home, 'Tarry with Laban a few days, until thy brother's anger be turned away; then will I send and fetch thee from thence' (vv.$^{44, 45}$). It was a well-laid scheme, but the result was different from the anticipation. Rebekah hoped that the absence of her favourite son, for which she herself was responsible, would last but a few days. But days lengthened into months, and the months wore into years. Seven years, which seemed to Jacob 'but a few days,' because they were full of love, were to his mother very real years, because she was yearning for love. And when the seven years were doubled and almost tripled, and her beloved son was still absent, she drooped and faded out of life. Retribution came to the too clever mother as well as to the too clever son. When they were parting, they said to one another that it was 'for a few days.' It was for ever.—The picture of Rebekah in Genesis is one of the most humanly interesting in the whole gallery of Bible portraits. Radiant in spirit, swift in action, pure and loving in heart, she lacks the grace of patience. Her eager mind is always moving her to ask questions, and she quits the scene with one of them—unanswered—on her lips (27^{46}). They are questions about the mystery of suffering, such as a woman can scarcely avoid asking. One of them is prompted by the pains of motherhood: 'If it be so, why am I thus?' another by the dread of bereavement: 'Why should I be robbed of you both in one day?' and a third by the greater dread of seeing her sons turn out prodigals: 'What good shall my life do me?' These questions have leaped to many a mother's lips since Rebekah first asked them. Even now the answers may be far from certain, for the Bible is human enough to leave some mysteries unsolved. And we like to think of Rebekah, not as a perplexed questioner of the meaning of life, puzzling over

> 'The reason o' the cause an' the wherefore o' the why,
> Wi' mony anither riddle brings the tear into my e'e,'

but as a happy young maiden gliding up and down the steps of

the well at Haran, drawing water for the camels till they have done drinking.

IV.

BETHEL.

GEN. XXVIII.

> 'As angels in some brighter dreams
> Call to the soul when man doth sleep;
> So some strange thoughts transcend our wonted themes,
> And into glory peep.'—VAUGHAN.

DISCIPLINE.—Jacob's departure from home is sudden and furtive. He is a fugitive from justice, glad to get away alive. He goes alone and afoot. One would expect to see Isaac's son attended on a journey by a cavalcade of camels bearing costly presents for his friends. But he has nothing but the staff which he carries in his hand. His thoughts are naturally gloomy enough. He is stepping into the dark unknown, facing the world without a friend. He spends his first night away from home on a bare hillside, where he has neither tent for shelter, fire for warmth, nor pillow for rest. The days of the years of his wanderings—which made him afterwards call his whole life a pilgrimage (47^9)—are begun. God's discipline is becoming more stringent; poverty, hardship, weariness, and pain will teach him many lessons which he could never have learned in days of wealth and ease. His flight from home makes an epoch in his life.

FAITH.—Jacob has many faults, which are neither concealed by the writers of the Bible nor readily forgiven by the charity of its readers. But if we are to do him justice we must admit that his was the mind which received the revelation of Bethel, one of the most majestic and beautiful visions of the spiritual world ever given to men. God cannot divulge His secrets unless there is a mind capable of appreciating them. His light is for the seeing eye, His truth for the hearing ear A divine revelation

becomes effective only in the thoughts and convictions of a mind susceptible of impressions from the world of spirits. Jacob, the typical Hebrew, has such a receptive mind. He has that imagination which, possessed and used by God, becomes the instrument of faith, the means of realising things hoped for and proving things not seen ; that imagination which has been called 'the most truth-bringing of mental powers.'[1] We shall never understand the Hebrew unless we know how he can pass at a bound from the hardness of materialism to the tenderness and elevation of mysticism. He is sensitively alive to spiritual influences ; the bent of his mind is Godward ; and when we imagine him sunk in the depths of earthliness, we are startled to find him rapt into communion with heaven, wistfully longing to find what lies behind the veil of sense, and confessing that man's sole happiness is to know and to do the will of God.

NATURE.—It is well known that Nature influences the mind and makes it peculiarly susceptible of spiritual impressions. If we must not make too much of what she can do, neither should we make too little. Jacob's vision was a mountain vision. God appeared to him upon the heights. The spot which became most sacred to him in all the world was the summit of Bethel. The æsthetic love of mountains may be a taste of advanced civilisation, a passion of the modern mind ; but the religious love of mountains is a primitive natural instinct of the soul. Canaan is a land of mountains. Jacob and other Hebrews lifted up their eyes unto the hills, and ascended their summits, because they discovered that God was nearer them there. They felt it easier to realise His presence there. Jacob found God on Bethel, and the time came when almost every mountain of that land had its sacred legend and shrine. The greatest prophets were mountain prophets ; the holiest temple was a mountain sanctuary ; and Jesus was in the succession when He preached, prayed, and was transfigured on mountains. If it is true that Bethel and many

[1] Dean Church.

another shrine had sooner or later to be desecrated, that was simply 'lest one good custom should corrupt the world.' The mountains had done their work, had whispered their secret. True religion can never cease to be a matter of spiritual elevation. Our whole outlook changes, our minds expand, our spirits rise as we ascend, and things invisible and incredible on the lower levels of life become self-evident on the heights.

Jacob's vision was also a night vision. The mystery of twilight increases the sensitiveness of the mind to spiritual things. Jacob saw the slopes of Bethel, which rise tier above tier like a gigantic staircase, receive 'the incomparable pomp of eve.' He saw the sun sink in splendour beyond the Great Sea. Some say that this is the psychological moment for a revelation.

> 'For sometimes when adown the western sky
> A fiery sunset lingers,
> Its golden gates swing inward noiselessly,
> Unlocked by unseen fingers.
> And while they stand a moment half ajar,
> Gleams from the inner glory
> Stream brightly through the azure vault afar
> And half reveal the story.'

But Jacob's vision comes later. Restless day is succeeded by quiet night. The wanderer lies down to rest; the stars are above him in their purity, calm, and glory; the fever, the anguish, the excitement of the day subside; sleep, the 'balm of hurt minds,' works its miracle; and God reveals Himself 'in dreams, in visions of the night.'

> 'There is in stillness oft a magic power
> To calm the breast, when struggling passions lower;
> Touched by its influence in the soul arise
> Diviner feelings, kindred with the skies.' [1]

REVELATION.—'Dreams are among the mysteries of the mind of man.' [2] It is well known that mathematicians have solved problems in dreams. Coleridge composed one of his finest poems in a dream. Stevenson conceived one of his thrilling romances

[1] Newman. [2] Emerson.

in a dream. Bunyan calls his great allegory a dream. Who has not often occasion to say, 'I had a dream which was not all a dream'? It is legitimate for any man to say:

> 'Yet in my dreams I'd be
> Nearer, my God, to Thee.'

There is no reason to doubt that God has often used men's dreams, not only to throw into brilliant and beautiful forms the thoughts and aspirations of the day, but also to bring forgotten and unimagined truths to light. It is probable that Jacob's dream was 'woven out of the materials that, all day long, had been fermenting in his mind.'[1] His ladder or staircase might be suggested either by a broad shaft of quivering light shot down from a summer cloud, or by the terraced mountain-slope bathed in the crimson of the setting sun. Be that as it may, the mystic ladder of his dream, on which angels ascended and descended, and at the top of which stood the LORD, was the medium of a divine revelation. Presenting heavenly truths to his mind in a splendid symbolism, it made the faith of his fathers, the belief in which he had been nurtured, for the first time vividly real and impressive to his own soul. It is a crisis in any man's spiritual history when he can say, 'I had heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear, but now mine eye seeth Thee.'[2] As a disclosure of the spiritual world, Jacob's vision makes life on earth far more wonderful than he has imagined it to be. It shows him radiances and splendours hitherto unseen, stirs in his heart emotions hitherto unfelt, shapes in his will resolutions hitherto unformed. The dream will fade, the symbols vanish, the voices fall silent. But the facts will remain: God in His heaven, loving and caring for men, sending forth His ministering spirits, and Himself speaking to the souls of men. These are no mere dreams but great realities, and the uniform result of the act of faith which accepts them is the shifting of the centre of life and all its interests from earth to heaven.

[1] A. B. Davidson.

[2] Job 42^5.

IDEALS.—The truths figured by Jacob's vision, the elementary facts of the Hebrew faith, have now happily become commonplaces, like sunbeams, rainbows, and other astonishing facts. The ordinary things both of nature and grace are the most wonderful of all. 1. The *Heaven* of the Hebrews was another and vaster order of things, beyond this scene of good and evil, as real to them as if they could see and feel and touch it, divine in origin, glorious in nature, eternal in duration ; in which God was supreme ; in which higher beings than man found blessedness in doing God's will ; and to which man was essentially and vitally related in consequence of his creation in the image of God, so that there was from the first the possibility, as by grace there came to be the reality, of communion between Heaven and earth. Heaven was the perfect or ideal world from which all good things came to men, and whose eternal laws were to be obeyed by men. Between Heaven, God's imperial palace or temple among the stars, and the world which He has given to the sons of men, there was a highway visible to the eye of faith, on which His messengers were ever speeding up and down on business relating to the welfare of men. 2. The *God* of the Hebrews was not an abstraction identical with nature or involved in nature, nor an absentee God careless of the affairs of earth, but a personal, gracious, loving, and lovable God, whose delights were with the children of men, who ordered their lives, whose presence made human life safe and delightful, whose goodness made it impossible for Him to break His promises or disappoint the sanguine hopes which men entertained of Him. 3. *Man's* place in the system of things was also made clear, and no part of the ancient Hebrew faith was more important than the belief about man. Created by God and for God, man came to himself only when he was taken into fellowship with God. He was a creature of this earth, dust returning to dust ; yet he was allied to the heavenly and divine, breathing the breath of God ; and the one thing which saved life in this world from being small and contemptible, which gave real worth and dignity to the passing things of time, was

the belief that the Eternal cared for man, took account of his doings, sent His messengers to minister to him, and called him to become His servant and even His friend. Are not these divinely inspired ideas of God and man, of heaven and earth, as necessary to-day as they were three thousand years ago? They are the Hebrew legacy to mankind.

ENCOURAGEMENT.—At Bethel, Jacob is promised a great and glorious future. The divine promises to his seed precede the promises to himself. His offspring are destined to inherit the land of Canaan, to become as the dust of the earth, and to spread abroad in every direction until in them all the families of the earth are blessed (vv.[13. 14]). Explain it as we will, it is certain that a whole nation came to cherish this faith. One of the smallest races of the world was so confident of its own future blessedness that it believed in the future blessedness of mankind. Its national hope expanded into a universal hope. It expected the whole earth first to covet and then to share its felicity! 'There is,' as Dean Church says, 'something perfectly overwhelming to mere human judgment in the audacity with which this people claim for their faith, for their God, the inheritance of all nations, the spiritual future of all mankind.' But their bold, imperial thinking has been amply justified. Their faith is winning the world's assent and devotion. Their ideal is at length being swiftly realised by the world-wide triumph of modern missions.—Then there are divine promises for Jacob himself (v.[15]). Three painful feelings oppressed him when he lay down on the moorland of Bethel. He was lonely, he was fearful, he was forsaken. And his God, coming nearer him in his dreams, promises him three things—fellowship, protection, and guidance. 'I am with thee, and will keep thee . . . I will not leave thee.' It is ignorance of the future that begets anxiety about the future. Jacob has a God who not only foresees but foreordains his future, and who, to free him from care, gives him prophecies and promises which assure him that all shall be well. Graciously binding Himself

to do certain things for him, He gives him the right to expect them, and so to face the future without fear.

Reverence.—When a new day is dawning over the hills of Gilead, Jacob rises from sleep and stands amazed. He realises that he is on consecrated ground. 'Surely God is in this place, and I knew it not' (v.[16]). He repeats the words, 'this place . . . this place . . . this . . . this' (v.[17]). He lay down on it, feeling only the cold night-dew falling about him, conscious only of the darkness without and within. Now he knows that he is in the presence of God. 'How dreadful is this place!'

> 'What if Thy form we cannot see,
> We know and feel that Thou art here.

Has God, then, come to alarm, rebuke, condemn the wayfarer? Is Jacob afraid of being crushed by a God of wrath? On the contrary, he has received nothing but assurances of God's loving-kindness, and promises of His watchful care. He has heard no word of upbraiding or threatening. Yet he feels how awful it is to be near God, how dreadful to have a heavenly search-light flashed into his soul. He is penetrated with holy fear, abashed by the pure splendour of the Divine. That does not mean that he wishes for a moment to escape from God. He would not for a world have spent this night anywhere but just where he has spent it; and he would not for a ransom be any-where now but just where he is. This spot will always be in his memory the dearest on earth, this night better than a thousand. But while he rejoices he trembles. No sinful man can be in the presence of God without fear. That sense of awe—we may feel it alone on a bare moorland under the stars, or in a great temple among a multitude of worshippers, or in an upper room where two or three friends are gathered together. But when it comes to us there is no mistaking it, for that reverential feeling is different from any other emotion that ever visits the human heart.

BETHEL.—'This place,' said Jacob, as he stood at Bethel in the morning light, 'is none other than the House of God, and this is the Gate of Heaven.' What kind of a place is Bethel to look at? It is no green oasis with murmuring brooks and rustling leaves and soft refreshing shades inviting travellers to rest. Bethel is a bare moorland, gashed and scarred, strewn with tumbled rocks, where no one would voluntarily spend a night. Yet to Jacob—and to many another after him—it was like the Presence-Chamber of the Most High. 'Faith inverts the vulgar order of things, and brings the mind to call that apparent which it uses to call real, and that real which it uses to call visionary.'[1] The other expression which Jacob applies to Bethel—the Gate of Heaven—is equally wonderful. 'What strange sights a little faith helps us to see! How it transforms the complexion of the world, how it pierces the veil that is hung across the face of things, and sees marvellous things behind! Till God opens our eyes, we see little. We come into the universe of God like the lower creatures—born blind. A miracle of healing must pass upon us. The Lord must put His fingers on our eyes before we can see anything of the true depths even of our common life and its relations; and, much more, of the inner life. Nay, we do not know God Himself till our eyes are opened to see Him. This wanderer thought the land of promise a weary, God-abandoned spot; God opened his eyes, and he found himself lying at the gate of heaven.'[2] This is the right answer to Hazlitt's familiar and plaintive objection. He says, 'In the days of Jacob there was a ladder between heaven and earth; but now the heavens have gone further off, and they have become astronomical.' The open eye of faith can see God even more clearly in Newton's than in Jacob's sky. The astronomical heavens are profoundly theological.

CONSECRATION.—Jacob's eye rests on the stone on which his head has lain during this never-to-be-forgotten night. He sets

[1] Emerson. [2] A. B. Davidson.

it up for a pillar, and pours oil on the top of it (v.[18]). What is his thought as he performs this act? How does he regard the stone? Some scholars believe that he thinks of it as the actual abode of the God (or rather the god) who has appeared to him in his dream. But that is not how the story is meant to be read. Genesis was not written for the purpose of encouraging fetichism. That there was such a thing as stone-worship among the primitive Semites is certain enough. 'Stones which had divine honours paid to them as being gods in corporeal form, or stones animated by a god, are of frequent occurrence among heathen peoples, not only in Canaan and among the Syrians and Arabs, but elsewhere in the East and in the West.'[1] But with fetichism the Bible has nothing to do except to get rid of it. It was the distinctive glory of the Hebrew faith, that it had power to throw off all kinds of superstition. The stone which Jacob sets up for a pillar is a simple memorial of a theophany. Whenever he comes this way again it will stir his soul to fresh devotion and gratitude. There is in the heart of man an insane passion for relic-worship, and Jacob's stone did not escape this foolish adoration. But the Hebrews were brilliant iconoclasts; therein lay their power. As soon as any sacred thing was seen to be mischievous, it was forthwith destroyed. Jacob's sacred pillar was destroyed, and though Bethel had been to Jacob the House of God and the Gate of Heaven, the holy ground was desecrated, and accursed by God's truest servants.[2] God's worship was removed to other places uncontaminated by man's odious ritualism.

COVENANTING.—The LORD having covenanted to be with Jacob, to keep him, to guide him, and never to leave him (v.[15]), Jacob in turn solemnly covenants to serve the LORD. If God will —as he knows that He will—be with him, and keep him, and give him bread and raiment, and bring him home in peace, and be his God, he will establish His worship at Bethel, and give Him tithes of all that he possesses (vv.[20-22]). What is the spirit in

[1] Dillmann. [2] Amos 5^5 etc.

which Jacob makes this covenant? It is sometimes said that he carries a mercenary spirit even into his prayers; that he carefully guards himself against an incautious and hasty pledge; that he makes his faith contingent on the divine bounty; that his vow is a cool prudential calculation; that he receives absolute promises but returns only conditional ones; that, in short, his covenant is 'an iniquitous attempt to bargain with the Most High.' 'Instead of being content with the glorious covenant which God had just given him, and taking God at His word, and thanking God for what He has done, he gets up and puts that "if" in. He wanted to make a bargain right there with the LORD.'[1] But this is hardly the way in which 'the great transaction is done.' The 'if' is logical, not theological. Jacob repeats the divine promises, not with shrewd suspicion, but with unquestioning acceptance. God's love and power are undoubted; His word is sure; and if the wayfarer puts bread and raiment among the promises, he may be forgiven. 'Then' in v.[21] is misleading, being too strong for the original. The spirit of the whole passage is reproduced almost to perfection in Doddridge's hymn, 'O God of Bethel,' a paraphrase of Jacob's words which is universally regarded as one of the most heart-moving poems in our language:

'Through each perplexing path of life
  Our wandering footsteps guide;
Give us each day our daily bread,
  And raiment fit provide.

O spread Thy covering wings around,
  Till all our wanderings cease,
And at our Father's loved abode
  Our souls arrive in peace.

Such blessings from Thy gracious hand
  Our humble prayers implore;
And Thou shalt be our chosen God,
  And portion evermore.'

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[1] D. L. Moody.

V.

LOVE.

GEN. XXIX. 1–30.

'No man could be a bad man who loved as Jacob loved Rachel.'
COLERIDGE.

HOPE.—From Bethel 'Jacob went on his journey' (29[1]). He 'lifted up his feet,' as the livelier Hebrew has it. He went forward with a new buoyancy in his step and a higher courage in his heart. He was animated by the hope which always thrills the soul when it is fresh from real communion with God. There are spiritual experiences after which 'we become physically nimble and lightsome; we tread on air; life is no longer irksome, and we think it will never be so.'[1] It is a rapture to face the unknown future, if God has promised to be with us and guide us. As the Hebrew prophet says: 'They that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.'[2]

IDYLLIC.—From bare mountains touched with a radiance from heaven and visited by angels, Jacob comes down to green pastures bathed in the light of common day and peopled by ordinary men and women. Yet in the simple life of the plains there is enough to move the heart and lift a man above himself. The story of the dawn of Faith is followed by the tale of the coming of Love. There is the same literary power and beauty in both narratives, but the change of tone and atmosphere is at once apparent. It is the difference between a solemn nocturne and a bright pastoral symphony. 'The land of the Children of the East' might be Arcadia, the classic country of peace and innocence and love, and the dialogue of the shepherds reads like

[1] Emerson. [2] Isa. 40[31].

a bit of Theocritus or Virgil. The scene comes vividly before our minds. The panting flocks lying round the well's mouth, the high sun beating down on the plains, the shepherds half dozing in the languorous heat; the entrance of a stranger who arouses them to animated conversation, and finds to his joy that he has come among friends; the approach of a shepherdess whom he finds to be his own cousin; his chiding of the lazy shepherds, whom he tries to dismiss that he may have the happiness of meeting his cousin alone, but whom he finds too clever or too stupid to take a hint; the meeting of Hebrew man and Syrian maid; his sudden access of strength, wherewith he heaves the huge well-stone from its place and waters her flock; his kiss of love and sudden uncontrollable burst of weeping,—all this is depicted, with simple dramatic charm, by a writer who has an eye to see, and the skill to make others see, the idyllic beauty of common life.

WOMANHOOD.—What lovely pictures of maidenly grace and freedom we find in the Old Testament stories! Rachel is the younger daughter of a Syrian flock-master. She is 'beautiful in form and face' (v.[17]). She keeps her father's sheep (v.[9]). She brings them to the watering (v.[6]). We see a gentle shepherdess leading and feeding her flock; now alone, now moving freely and fearlessly among the shepherds; unveiled, and unashamed to let the sun dye her cheeks or any human eyes look in hers. She has grown up in the light of day. She has absorbed the elements. She runs (v.[12]), like another child of the open air—

> 'sportive as the fawn,
> That wild with glee upon the lawn
> Or up the mountain springs.'[1]

Love comes to her, as it came to Rebekah, at the well, while she is busied with the common tasks of her daily life. We picture her with her crook in her hand, and her sheep behind

[1] Wordsworth.

her; herself a free, graceful creature, destined to be the mother of one of the best and noblest of men. In Eastern lands at the present day, woman knows little or nothing of freedom. It is a sin for any stranger ever to see her, speak to her, or even to ask for her. Servile submission is her highest duty. In her home she is as much a captive as a linnet in a cage; and if ever she is allowed to go out, she must veil her face and be silent. What she needs, what she unconsciously sighs for, is the religion which brings deliverance to the captive and gives every woman a woman's share in life's happiness. True faith and freedom have always gone together.

LOVE.—Henceforth the names of Jacob and Rachel are linked together. At first the course of their love runs smooth, and nothing in Jacob's after-life should blind us to the idyllic beauty of this earlier time. Whatever his faults might be, he had at least lived a clean and wholesome life. He had a pure heart to offer the maiden whom he loved, and the years in which he wooed her were the golden time of his life. The essence of a hundred love-tales is contained in the simple words, 'And Jacob served seven years for Rachel; and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had to her' (v.[20]). This is first love, radiant with the promise of hope, strong with the concentrated energy of 'all thoughts, all passions, all delights.' It is the love of one for one, pure, unselfish; sweetheart love in its grace and charm; heaven-kindled love with a magic power to change all sacrifice into joy. The music of a voice, the sound of a foot-fall, suffices to make hard tasks light. 'Love is a great thing, a blessing very good, the only thing which makes all burdens light, bearing evenly what is uneven, carrying a weight without feeling it, turning all bitterness into a sweet savour. It makes light of toil, would do more than it can, and pleads no impossibility, but is strong for anything.'[1] 'The best life is that in which one does and bears everything because of some great

[1] Thomas à Kempis.

and strong feeling, so that this and that in one's circumstances does not signify.'[1] As Ferdinand, carrying his logs, exclaims:

> 'This my task
> Would be as heavy to me as odious; but
> The mistress whom I serve quickens what's dead,
> And makes my labours pleasures.'[2]

RETRIBUTION.—Rachel was to be Jacob's helpmeet, comrade, and friend; the sharer of his aspirations, hopes, and joys; his fellow-traveller to the land of promise; the angel of his earthly pilgrimage. For this was a Hebrew, as it is now an English ideal:

> 'To lead sweet lives in purest chastity,
> To love one maiden only, cleave to her,
> To worship her by years of noblest deeds
> Until thou win her.'[3]

But the idyll of pure love ends in an act of base treachery. Laban and Leah play the part of conspirators against Jacob and Rachel. Laban's excuse for his conduct is the lamest ever offered. The information which he gives his nephew about the customs of Syria (v.^{26}) comes seven years too late (v.^{19}). Delitzsch says in his *Genesis* that the custom of not marrying the younger daughter before the elder is still 'stubbornly adhered to in India and in the old imperial towns of Germany.' It is well to circulate the information, that if any of Jacob's sons go to India or the old imperial German towns, they may be forewarned and forearmed. In Haran, Jacob was kept all the time in the dark, and a base advantage taken of his ignorance. 'Wherefore,' he asks one of the conspirators, 'hast thou beguiled me?' Guile is seen to be a mean and cruel sin. But we turn back a few pages in the narrative, and we hear Isaac saying to Esau, 'Thy brother came with guile, and hath taken away thy blessing' (27^{35}). The beguiler is beguiled. God's balance is true. Sooner or later He gives measure for measure. The deceiver is deceived that he may learn to loathe deception.

[1] George Eliot. [2] *The Tempest.* [3] Tennyson.

The culprit changed into a judge sees all the baseness of his sin. 'The LORD will punish Jacob according to his ways; according to his doing will He recompense him.'[1]

> 'The tissues of the life to be
> We weave with colours of our own;
> And in the field of destiny
> We reap as we have sown.'[2]

VI.

MEMORY.

GEN. XXIX. 31–XXXI.

> 'I am sad, and fain
> Would give you all to be but where I was.'
>
> BROWNING.

MONOGAMY.—Jacob found himself drawn, first by a cunning conspiracy, and then by his own too easy consent, into a marriage with two sisters. This unhappy relationship afterwards became very repellent to the Hebrews. 'Thou shalt not,' said their lawgiver, 'take a woman to her sister, to be a rival to her, beside the other in her lifetime.'[3] Jacob's double marriage was therefore regarded not as an example, but as a warning. A plurality of wives was never more than tolerated among the Hebrews. It might be endured for the hardness of men's hearts, but no one ever dreamed of commending it as well-pleasing to God. It was never supposed to be the divine ideal. 'There is a great difference between deeming a state permissible and proposing it as a condition of sanctity.'[4] The same writer[5] who tells the story of Jacob's marriage wrote also the memorable words, 'Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife; and they shall be one flesh' (2^{24}). 'We may regard monogamy either in the light of an intuitive moral

[1] Hos. 12^{2}. [2] Whittier. [3] Lev. 18^{18}. [4] Lecky. [5] The Jahvist.

sentiment, or in the light of the interests of society.'[1] Genesis explicitly and implicitly advocates the construction of the family on the basis of monogamy. The lifelong union of one man with one woman—seen in the cases of Isaac and Rebekah, Joseph and Asenath—is the normal and dominant type.

CHILDHOOD.—Jacob's home in Haran could not have much joy. It contained too many elements of friction and disquiet. Rachael and Leah might be happy enough together as sisters, but not as the wives of one husband. No man ever gave his heart to two women. Jacob's marriage with Leah was, and could not but be, loveless. One wife was much loved and the other unloved; the unloved was a mother, and the much loved childless; and other elements made the situation still more complicated. 'Wherever there is polygamy women in general show themselves addicted to the petty forms of vanity, jealousy, spitefulness, and ambition.'[1] Yet gleams of joy come to this Syrian home. Every child born into it is regarded as a gift of God. Almost every name is a thanksgiving for divine goodness, or a prayer for further blessing. 'The LORD hath looked upon my affliction' (Reuben); 'the LORD hath heard' (Simeon); 'I will praise the LORD' (Judah), are some of Leah's thoughts. 'God is my judge' (Dan); 'the LORD add to me another son' (Joseph), are thoughts of Rachel. Other names are self-congratulatory. 'Fortunate!' (Gad), and 'Happy am I: for the daughters shall call me happy!' (Asher) are exclamations of Leah. Such names give us a glimpse into an ordinary Hebrew household at the time when a fresh young life comes 'out of the infinite into here.' Mother-love watching an infant's slumbers is perfect love, and the earthly home to which God's blessings are felt to come is not without its broken lights of paradise. 'It is when children are born into the world that the pious feelings of parents are most strongly evoked and expressed. So the names of most children are compounded of the Divine name. . . . The story of the naming of Jacob's

[1] Lecky.

children in Padanaram is full of indications how closely men and women felt Jehovah to be bound up with their history."[1]

LABOUR.—Joy in labour has ceased under the sun when a man no longer works for love, but only for pay. From his wedding-day onwards Jacob serves Laban with a deep resentment in his breast. He feels that he has been cruelly wronged; he regards his uncle and master—now his father-in-law—as his enemy, whose purpose is to thwart him in every possible way. And Jacob retaliates. To defeat his kinsman and enrich himself at his expense becomes the chief end of his action. At the game of beggar my neighbour two can play. So the stress and toil and ambition of Jacob's life in Haran are henceforth utterly selfish. He knows how to make the feebler of the flock Laban's and the stronger his own, how to make white sheep drop black-spotted lambs and black goats have white-spotted kids, and how to turn every apparent loss into real gain. Success crowns his efforts, and the wily Hebrew can laugh in his sleeve at the domineering Syrian lord. 'The man increased exceedingly, and had large flocks, and manservants and maid-servants, and camels and asses' (v.[43]). But while the end is certainly reached, the means trouble every reader of the story. Many things are recorded in the Bible regarding the servants of God which are not endorsed. Probably no one has ever expressed a whole-hearted approval of Jacob's methods except Shylock, who says with a glow of admiring enthusiasm:

'That was the way to thrive, and he was bless'd.'

The universal conscience rather answers, 'No, better not to thrive at all than thrive in that way.' 'We must not suppose that at the time when the Book of Genesis was written the Hebrews had so little idea of honesty as not to disapprove of Jacob's conduct towards Laban.'[2] When we observe that in the heat of the long contest, in the daily presence of the enemy,

[1] A. B. Davidson. [2] Oort.

Jacob's words become bitter, his spirit loses its calm, and time no longer swiftly glides as it did when his heart was ruled by love, we cannot but infer that in the midst of his worldly success he has fallen far below his ideal.

BETHEL.—The situation gradually became intolerable to everybody. Laban's frown was habitual (31[2]). His sons were loud and bitter in their complaints on the one side (v.[1]), his daughters on the other (v.[15]). And Jacob grew sick at heart in the midst of it all. A crisis had to come, and it came through the resurrection of the divine ideal in his soul. Once and again, awake and asleep, he heard the God of Bethel calling him back to the land of his fathers and to his kindred (vv.[3, 13]). It was the voice of God in his own heart and conscience ; it was memory bringing the past to mind, and imagination making the distant near ; it was the divine discontent of a spirit that refuses to be for ever sunk in worldliness ; it was whatever was most sacred in his experience of life—kindred and fatherland, the holy mountain, the pillar, the anointing oil, the solemn vow (vv.[3, 13])—crowding into his troubled mind ; it was the God of his father (v.[5]), 'the God of Bethel' (v.[13]), 'the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac' taking possession of his soul and saying, 'Return !' Into the midst of what is sordid and selfish, feverish and false, there come memories of another and a higher life, which the soul has once tasted and can never wholly forget. Heart-hunger for the old faith and home of one's youth, whetted by weariness and satiety in the midst of worldly success, has been many a man's salvation.

FATHERHOOD.—Laban never tells his daughters that he loves them, till they are leaving him for ever. Rachel and Leah have long thirsted for an affection which they have never received. At last they despair of ever receiving it. Though they are placed in a position in which mutual jealousy seems inevitable, yet their father's unfatherly treatment draws them together and makes them speak with one voice (v.[14]). The word father, which

should be one of the sweetest in any language, is uttered by them with an accent of bitterness. They complain that they have no portion or inheritance in their father's house (v.[14]); they are counted by him strangers; he has sold them as chattels, and devoured their money (v.[15]). So complete is their estrangement from their father, that they consent to steal away from home without saying a word of farewell. When they are carrying out their purpose, Laban follows and overtakes the fugitives, and shows himself the kindest father alive. They need not have fled away from him secretly: had he known they were leaving, he would have given them a send-off with mirth and with songs, with tabret and with harp, with the fond kiss of love (vv.[27, 28]). He adjures his son-in-law never to afflict his daughters, never to be unfaithful to them (v.[50]). Seven times he repeats the gracious words 'my daughters.' When he rises up early in the morning, kisses them, gives them his blessing, and then turns his face homewards (v.[55]), his heart is wrung with genuine grief. It is beautiful; the only pity is that it comes so late. A little of the mirth and song, a touch of the tabret and the harp, an occasional kiss of love, a tender utterance of the words 'my daughter'—indeed a tithe of this farewell effusiveness, would have made all the difference in the world to those whose hearts were starving for a little natural affection. During all the long years Laban is a 'stranger' to his daughters, and only for one brief day of parting, a 'father.' 'There's the respect which makes calamity of so long life.'

> 'O the little more, and how much it is!
> O the little less, and what worlds away!'

VINDICATION.—Jacob as a servant impeaches Laban as a master (vv.[36-42]). Being righteously angry, he speaks in a lofty tone. After a long silence he unburdens his mind. He has been twenty years in Laban's employment, and he has had hard work, poor wages, heavy losses, plain fare, and little sleep. He has endured the scorching sun by day and the biting frost by night. He has been patient and uncomplaining in the service of a hard

and grudging master, who at the end of it all would think nothing of sending him away empty. God in heaven alone knows how he has toiled and suffered, and it would have gone ill indeed with him but for His presence and protection. It is an eloquent speech, finely phrased, with an accent of personal feeling vibrating through it. 'The speech of Jacob has, by reason of the strong emotion and self-conscious elevation expressed in it, both rhythmic movement and poetic form.'[1] 'Indignation makes good verses,'[2] and a sharp sense of wrong makes telling speeches. Jacob's words have the ring of sincerity: it is always touching to hear a patient and long-suffering man tell in simple language what he has come through; and if ever a man deserved to be humiliated, it was Laban. Yet every reader feels that there is another side of the matter. Jacob's suffering is not unmerited. It is only to Laban that he can throw down the challenge, 'What is my tresspass? what is my sin, that thou hast so hotly pursued after me?' Let him put these questions to God, and the torrent of his eloquence will freeze on his lips. 'If *Thou*, LORD, shouldest mark iniquities, O LORD, who shall stand?'[3]

FAITH.—The religion of Laban the Syrian is not quite easy to understand. He acknowledges that 'the LORD' has blessed him for Jacob's sake, having 'divined' it (30^{27}). Receiving in a night vision a warning that he must not injure Jacob, he feels that it has come from 'the God of Isaac' (31^{29}). Making a covenant with Jacob, he invokes 'the LORD' to watch and witness between them ($vv.^{49, 50}$); and again he calls upon 'the God of Abraham, the God of Nahor, and the God of their father' to judge between them ($v.^{53}$). Laban believes that this God, under a variety of names, blesses, warns, watches, witnesses, judges; his belief affects him alike in waking and in sleeping hours; and he is in some ways a better man for it. But he always speaks of this God as other people's God, never as 'my God.' It is to him a derived and impersonal faith. On the other

[1] Delitzsch. [2] Horace. [3] Ps. 130^3.

hand, he contends with fierce energy for what he calls 'my gods'; he is intensely excited over the loss of them; he thinks that the good fortune of his house somehow depends upon them. These gods are teraphim,—little carved or graven images,—and have their place among the other 'household stuff' (v.[37]). Some Syrians would say, 'We do not worship these things; they are only symbols of the true God, and aids to our worship of Him.' So a few philosophical people have reasoned in all ages; but the vast majority of people do not reason; and when teraphim are kissed and adored and treasured as 'gods,' the spiritual worship of the living and unseen God goes into the background or is entirely discarded. Jacob and the other patriarchs use no teraphim; they worship the Invisible alone; and the victory which the Hebrews win for mankind is a victory of spiritual faith.

WATCHING.—As Laban and Jacob stand together on Mount Gilead, the better elements of the two men's characters come into view. The sense of the presence of God overawes them, the thought of final parting solemnises them, and some touches of nature finally make them once more kin. Arguing and reasoning alone would never have reconciled them; but God is above them, little children are around them, and they relent. Angry recriminations cease, and they speak in softer tones. 'Now then,' is the proposal which comes from Laban, 'let us make a covenant, I and thou' (v.[44]). They pledge themselves not to harm one another; they erect memorials of their covenant; Laban gives the 'heap of witness' a Syrian and Jacob a Hebrew name. Before they offer sacrifice and eat bread together, before they kiss and part in peace, they agree, at Laban's suggestion, to call their mount of reconciliation 'Mizpah.' They will think of it in future as God's 'Watch-tower.' It will remind them that the LORD is watching when they are absent from one another (v.[49]); and if either of them shall violate the solemn covenant, it will utter its solemn protest. Pointing to the skies, and visible from every side, it will silently

warn them that God, watching over Hebrew and Syrian alike, slumbers not nor sleeps. 'No man,' said Laban, 'is with us; see, God is witness between me and thee' (v.[50]). We can forgive much to Laban for that great thought and that beautiful name. There were many other Mizpahs in Israel in later times —common watch-towers where sentinels nightly stood on guard. But Laban's Mizpah makes us think of the high God on *His* watch-tower of the heavens. No friendship is so fast as that which is consecrated by a common faith. The breach of a covenant made in God's sight is only one point removed from atheism. It is our fidelity to God, our sense of responsibility to Him, that keeps us faithful in all our relationships to our fellow-men.

VII.

WRESTLING.

GEN. XXXII.-XXXIII.

> 'Who never ate his bread in sorrow,
> Who never spent the darksome hours
> Weeping and watching for the morrow,
> He knows you not, ye heavenly Powers.—GOETHE.

PROTECTION.—Jacob was venturing back to Canaan after twenty years of exile. It was a perilous step to take, and his mind was not free from foreboding, nor his conscience from guilt. But he was not without a sense of divine encouragement and protection. He believed that he was returning in obedience to a divine summons, and when he lifted his eyes heavenwards, he somehow realised that the LORD of hosts was with him in His mighty power. 'He went on his way, and the angels of God met him' (32[1]). 'Whether visible to an eye of sense, or, as would appear, only to the eye of faith, they *are* visible to this troubled man; and, in a glow of confident joy, he calls the name of that place Mahanaim, two camps. One camp was the little

one down here . . . and the other was the great one up there.'[1] Pilgrims passing the place in after days found a heartening message in the very name of the place. The Hebrews believed in the existence of spirits brighter, stronger, better, happier than men; messengers of One from whom all their glory was derived; benignant guardian angels, an armed host, charged to protect God's servants in time of danger and cheer them on their way. 'The angel of the LORD encamps round about them that fear Him, and delivers them.'[2] Milton has given expression to this belief in the words:

> 'Millions of spiritual creatures walk the earth
> Unseen, both when we wake and when we sleep.'

General Gordon's last letter from Khartoum, written just before his betrayal and death, ends with the words, 'The angels of God are with me—Mahanaim.'

TRUTH.—Jacob could not go to meet his brother with a bold mien. The old memory of a deceitful act on his part, followed by a terrible threat on his brother's part, made him still afraid. He could not go forward with the proud consciousness of rectitude. He had not the open face of truth. A sin on the conscience unnerves a man almost like a clot of blood on the brain. Valour is proverbially wedded to truth. 'Sincerity, a great, deep, genuine sincerity, is the first characteristic of all men in any way heroic.'[3] 'Truth is our only armour in all passages of life and death.'[4]

TRIAL.—Jacob sent messengers to 'my lord Esau' to find grace in his sight. How did Esau receive them? The Talmud hazards a guess. It speaks of Esau thus: 'All the wrong which Jacob had done him freshened in his memory, and his anger and hate against his brother burned once more fiercely in his heart. . . . And he answered with pride, "Twice he supplanted me.

[1] A. Maclaren.
[2] Ps. 34[7].
[3] Carlyle.
[4] Emerson.

Therefore I come to meet him, and the vengeance for which I have waited twenty years shall now be mine."' But this is unfair to Esau. His mother, who knew him best, said that his anger would soon turn away, and he would forget ($27^{44.\ 45}$). Esau was a man of strong barbaric nature, with the virtues and the vices of a heroic savage. If he was swept by stormy gusts of passion, he was also melted into moods of tender pity. He oscillated between the impulses of cruelty and of kindness. If he was terrible in his anger, he was generous in his love. The uncertainty of the envoys as to how he received their message intensifies the dramatic interest of the story. They could only report that Esau was coming to meet his brother with four hundred men. Jacob's heart sank with terror. His imagination conjured up a dreadful retribution. He and his whole family were in instant peril of destruction. He saw Esau and his savage horde smiting 'the mother with the children.' The situation was horrible. But there is at least this benefit in a shock of mental anguish, that it stirs a man to the depth of his nature, and compels him to feel, think, and act from the very centre of his being. It shows all that a man is and all that he is worth.

PRAYER.—At the core of Jacob's being there seem to be always two things—a plan and a prayer. The one represents his faith in himself, the other his faith in God. His fertility of adroit adjustments is almost uncanny, and yet he seems in the end to

> 'Grow willing, having tried all other ways,
> To try just God's.'

His first plan and prayer on this occasion are found in 32^{7-12}. He divides his people, his flocks, his herds, and his camels into two companies, thinking that 'if Esau come to the one company and smite it, then the company which is left shall escape.' But the thought naturally brings him only cold comfort; in imagination he still sees a welter of blood; and the intolerable vision brings him to his knees. He pours out his soul to God in prayer.

Among the ancient Hebrews 'prayer had no fixed form. So far as is known to us it was only the expression of real and strong feelings, such as gratitude, anxiety, and sorrow, and not a sacred form independent of special causes.'[1] Yet this heart-cry of a man in distress contains all the elements of a complete prayer. (1) In his solemn *invocation* he makes use of the names which give most glory to God and bring most comfort to his own heart: 'O God of my father Abraham, and God of my father Isaac, O LORD, who saidst unto me, Return unto thy country, and to thy kindred, and I will do thee good.' The divine attributes have to be realised before the troubled soul can recover any degree of confidence. Everything that God is known to be is a ray of hope in darkness, a source of strength in weakness. In the magnificent language of the Hebrew proverb, 'The name of the LORD is a strong tower; the righteous runneth into it and is safe.'[2] (2) In his humble *confession* Jacob wrings his hands and cries, 'I am not worthy of the least of Thy mercies'; which is the substance of every penitential utterance. He could make a strong enough self-defence, if occasion required it, before man (31^{36}), but he has no righteousness to plead before God. He never deserved God's mercies, and the miserable return he has made for them fills him with shame. He humbles, he condemns himself. With genuine pain in his heart and a break in his voice he mourns his unworthiness. 'For merit lives from man to man, but not from man, O LORD, to Thee.' (3) In his warm *thanksgiving* he is specific and detailed. He recalls the day on which he crossed this Jordan with no possession but the staff he had in his hand. He marvels at the contrast between what he was and what he has become. Can he be the same person? He almost doubts his identity.

> 'When all Thy mercies, O my God,
> My rising soul surveys,
> Transported with the view, I'm lost
> In wonder, love, and praise.'[3]

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[1] Schultz. [2] Prov. 18^{10}. [3] Addison.

He thanks God with a special emphasis for His truth (v.[10]). This man who has sometimes been so false remembers that his God has always been absolutely true. He has the divine ideal of truth in his own soul, as every other man has ; and he would despair if he imagined for a moment that God could ever be aught but faithful and true. (4) In his trembling *supplication* he prays for personal deliverance. He believes that his life is in imminent danger. He prays for the averting of a dreaded calamity. 'Deliver me, I pray Thee, from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau : for I fear him.' (5) In his tender *intercession* he pleads for the lives of 'the mother and the children.' His fear for them is proportionate to his love, and love and fear together make any man a strong and moving intercessor. (6) In his earnest *pleading* he entreats God to do all this for His own promises' sake. As at the beginning, so at the end of his prayer, he urges the plea : 'Thou saidst.' That is the element of hope in all prayer. In one way or another God has promised, and will be true. He can never go back on His word. To remind Him of His promises is to offer true prayer We get a grip for our hands out of 'Thou saidst'; we lay hold on the pledge of a faithful God.

Power.—Fine as this prayer is, both in thought and in expression, it leaves something to be desired. It is a cry *de profundis*, but not out of the lowest depths of this man's complex nature. Having earnestly prayed for Divine deliverance, he rises from his knees and returns to his plans. Motives come surging up from the other side of his character. Ideas teem in his active brain. It is as natural for him to scheme as to breathe. His second device was more ingenious and effective than the first. He felt that the situation called for a sacrifice. He would send a princely gift from 'thy servant Jacob' to 'my lord Esau.' He would capture his brother with kindness. 'I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face ; peradventure he will accept me' (v.[20]). An offering of five hundred and eighty cattle of various kinds was despatched with 'a space betwixt drove

and drove,' the messengers rehearsing their part ere they went. That seemed a good day's work, and Jacob might look forward with more confidence to the morrow. At anyrate, he felt that he had now done his best, and might as well go to rest. 'So the present passed over before him, and he lodged that night in the company' (v.[21]). But 'that night' (v.[22])—the repetition of the words at once arrests us—his eyes were to have no sleep; that night he was to learn that there still remained something far greater and better for him to do; that night Jacob was to become Israel, to have power with God and prevail, to discover a secret which was ere long to give his people the spiritual leadership among the nations of the earth.

WATCHNIGHT.—At nightfall Jacob was seized with an overmastering desire for solitude. Long ago he was alone in a memorable night of peaceful sleep on the hill of heavenly vision (28[11]), and now he was to be alone in a still more memorable watchnight of wrestling agony. The place was appropriate—he was on the banks of the twisting and moaning Jabbok. He rose and moved his camp across the rushing ford, and returned. He was left behind in the darkness. Then came the great spiritual experience of his life. 'That night' he did not simply commune with his own soul. He was 'wrestled with,' 'touched,' 'strained'; he was questioned, renamed, and blessed. His experience is variously reported in mysterious language, as if one were trying to utter the unutterable. The narrator in Genesis says, 'There wrestled a Man with him until the breaking of the day' (v.[24]). One of the prophets says, 'He had power with the Angel, and prevailed.'[1] Jacob says, 'I have seen God face to face' (v.[30]). And the Unknown Himself says, 'Wherefore is it that thou askest after my name?' Man, Angel, God, Nameless—here is a mystery which we cannot solve. If 'to the thoughtful mind that walks with Him, He half reveals His face,'[2] He also 'hides Himself most wonderfully.'[3] 'The secret things belong unto the LORD; but the things which are

[1] Hos. 12[4]. [2] Newman. [3] Faber.

revealed belong unto us.'[1] Every spiritual experience is supernatural, and when divine facts have to be expressed in human language, the instrument is not always adequate. One of the Psalmists, for instance, says, 'Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me,' and adds, 'Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is too high, I cannot attain unto it.'[2] But this much is certain—that Jacob's experience was not something unparalleled, and that many a man who tries to give expression to the deepest facts in his life has to use the language of this narrative. The age of spiritual miracles never passes. Every night God is changing some Jacob into an Israel. 'I have no expectation that any man will read history aright, who thinks that what was done in a remote age, by men whose names have resounded far, has any deeper sense than what he is doing to-day.'[3]

WRESTLING.—Till that night Jacob imagined that his antagonist was Esau. On the previous day his prayer was: 'Deliver me from the hand of my brother, from the hand of Esau: for I fear him, lest he come and smite me, the mother with the children' (32^{11}). Now he forgets Esau, forgets mother and children, loses all sense of personal danger at the hands of men, and feels himself in the grasp of a superhuman Power, who wrings from him the confession that he is a mean Trickster, and lays him, quivering, convulsed, prostrate, at His feet. Jacob, the most dogged, persistent, self-reliant of men, feels his strength shrivel like a leaf at the touch of fire. And yet at this moment he realises that God is not mercilessly, but mercifully, severe; and just when his faith in himself is extinguished, a new faith in God suddenly shines forth inextinguishable. It dawns upon him that the blessing which he has long sought will now be granted to him; and, with a new use of his old tenacity and strength of character, he clings to God and claims His love; and it is not refused. Smitten and subdued, weeping and making supplication,[4]

[1] Deut. 29^{29}. [2] Ps. $139^{5, 6}$. [3] Emerson. [4] Hos. 12^{4}.

'importunate in self-despair,' he obtains all that he asks—not as a supplanter but as a suppliant, not as Jacob but as Israel.

ISRAEL.—Among the Hebrews a new name was often given a man to indicate a change in his character. It marked a complete break with the past and the beginning of a new life. The name 'Israel' is an instance. In the morning after his night of wrestling, Jacob enters upon a higher life. 'The struggle perfects his character';[1] at least it tends in that direction. He has had power with God, and will prevail against men (v.[28] margin). The man of crafty and crooked dealing will now obtain the name and fame of a hero of faith. He is another man, humbled under the mighty hand of God; another man, victorious and princely by his faith in God. He has become a partaker of the divine nature. Therefore he hears the divine word: 'Thy name shall no more be called Jacob, but Israel' (v.[28]). And what was true of this one man was to be true of a nation. 'It is the real spirit of Israel which is here glorified and set before the people as in a mirror.'[1] Israel's characteristics were not to be wealth and splendour, learning and genius, valour and enterprise. Athens became 'the mother of arts and eloquence,'[2] and it was 'thine, O Rome, to rule.'[3] But Israel had the highest, princeliest gift of all—power with God through faith and prayer. Weak and helpless, Israel clung to God, would not let Him go, and was blessed.

MYSTERY.—Jacob begged that he might know his Benefactor's name, but it was not conceded to him. 'Wherefore is it,' came the answer, 'that thou dost ask after my name?' Another Hebrew asked the same question, 'What is Thy name, that when Thy words come to pass we may do Thee honour?' and received almost the same answer, 'Wherefore askest thou after my name, seeing it is wonderful!'[4] God wraps Himself in mystery. He partly reveals and partly conceals Himself. His

[1] Dillmann. [2] Milton. [3] Virgil [4] Judg. 13[17. 18].

purpose is to keep man, not in ignorance, but in lowly reverence. Wonder is an element of worship. God is not angry with man for his reverent curiosity ; He rather stimulates it to the utmost ; but there are limits which He will not let it overstep. He says, 'Thus far shalt thou come, and no farther.' We have no line with which to measure the Infinite. 'Who can by searching find out God? who can find out the Almighty unto perfection?'

> 'No answer came back, not a word,
> To the patriarch there by the ford ;
> No answer has come through the ages
> To the poets, the saints, and the sages,
> Who have sought in the secrets of science
> The name and the nature of God
> But the answer that was and shall be,
> "My name! Nay, what is that to thee?"'[1]

Yet God does reveal Himself. He is not the unknown and unknowable. His revelations come to the heart and the conscience ; they come in the experiences of life ; and they come really rather than verbally. When God has wrestled with Jacob and blessed him, Jacob knows God, although His name is withheld. He knows His power and His grace ; knows Him as the source of blessing ; knows how wonderful and adorable He is. For the rest, mystery does not repel men from God, it attracts them to Him ; and in view of the infallible assurances of the soul we may reverently say even of God, 'What's in a name?' If the Hebrews could do nothing better, they could at least now call upon the 'God of Jacob.' They could encourage one another by saying, 'The Name of the God of Jacob defend thee.'[2] The contents of that designation, the experiences which it recalled, were full of inspiration. 'Therefore, to whom turn I but to Thee, the ineffable Name?'[3]

DAWN.—Jacob's vigil at the Jabbok was a solemn night-scene. But 'the sun rose upon him as he passed over Penuel' (v.[31]). It

[1] John Hay's *Israel*. [2] Ps. 20[1]. [3] Browning.

was now full bright day within and without.'[1] 'Everything assumed a smiling aspect.'[2] Touches like this are not put into the picture by a happy chance. The narrator is an inspired man of the order of Bunyan and Blake, who perceives the deeper meaning of physical facts. When one has been toiling upward through the night into the fellowship and favour of God, the morning light has a radiance which it never had before. There is an added splendour which comes from the soul that is born to a new life. Then 'a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun.' Weeping endureth for a night ; but joy cometh in the morning. The day dawns, and the shadows flee away. It is recorded of Luther that the night before the most trying day in his troubled life was 'a time of terrible depression, conflict, despair, and prayer. Before the day broke the victory had been won, and he felt in a great calm.'[3] 'O send out Thy light and Thy truth : let them lead me. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God : for I shall yet praise Him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God.'[4]

RECONCILIATION.—Jacob now goes to meet his brother without fear. The event shows, in truth, that there was small cause for alarm. Esau's last uttered words, which hastened Jacob's flight from Canaan, were fearful enough : 'The days of mourning for my father are at hand ; then will I slay my brother Jacob' (27^{41}). But the fratricidal impulse was only momentary. While Jacob remembered the dark threat, Esau himself forgot it. His sudden blaze of anger, instead of smouldering down into a life-long hatred, quite died out ; and on Jacob's return to Canaan, 'Esau ran to meet him, and embraced him, and fell upon his neck, and kissed him : and they wept' (33^{4}). Esau might be reckless and impulsive, but he was not malevolent ; he was quicker to forgive than to blame ; and when his heart was touched, the strong man wept like a woman. The veil of

[1] Delitzsch. [2] Dillmann [3] Lindsay's *Luther*. [4] Ps. $43^{3, 5}$.

oblivion drops on a lifetime, leaving only the memory of home and mother-love and childhood. The springs of natural affection are perennial, time works its miracle of healing, and brothers mingle their tears of love. Genesis is a book of reconciliations. Families are for a time estranged, and one brother would not be sorry to see another dead. But absence makes the heart grow fonder, and evening brings all home.

ENOUGH.—It is remarkable that Esau speaks as one of those rarely fortunate men who can say, 'I have enough' (33^{9}), and Jacob as another (v.[11]). Esau has to all appearance become the greater of the two. Surrounded by his four hundred men—'the folk that are with me,' as he says in his lordly style—he is a very striking figure. The hunter of stags has become a captain of soldiers. He has the physical prowess which commands the admiration of strong men. He is honoured as a mighty chieftain. He receives Jacob and his family almost like a king holding a court. Jacob 'bowed himself to the ground seven times. . . . Then the handmaids came near, they and their children, and they bowed themselves. And Leah and her children came near, and bowed themselves; and after came Joseph near and Rachel, and they bowed themselves' (vv.[3. 6. 7]). Jacob calls Esau 'my lord,' and himself 'thy servant.' Esau has obtained all that he ever wished—wives and children, wealth and honour and power. He has come into his kingdom; he has realised his ideal; what grudge can he bear against any man? Envy on his part is out of the question. In losing the birthright, what has he lost? A poet has tried to answer this question, and comes near the mark when he represents him as saying of his brother:

> 'He won the birthright—little won!
> He won, and yet I cannot see
> That what he won was loss to me.
> I am a prince, an army mine;
> A kingdom grows around my sword;
> The Hivites flee before my face;
> I have my pleasure in the chase,

> Now hunting men, now hunting beasts . . .
> I live for what these eyes can see :
> This happy earth's enough for me!'

Jacob also says, 'I have enough' (v.[11]), but with a difference. Words have shades of meaning which they derive from the men who use them. The context often throws light on the text. Esau says simply, 'I have enough; my brother, let that thou hast be thine.' Jacob says, 'Take, I pray thee, my gift; because God hath dealt graciously with me, and because I have enough.' The one has enough, the other has enough by the grace of God. Some may regard the *Dei gratiâ* as an empty formality. But to others it is the matter of supreme importance. They count it as natural to acknowledge an obligation to God as a debt to man. They can never say, 'This happy earth's enough.' Nothing satisfies them but the conviction that life itself and all the blessings of life are the bountiful gifts of a gracious God. Lord Bacon's saying, 'Prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament,' needs to be qualified. Prosperity with the favour of God is the blessing of the Old Testament. There are not a few noble instances in which men declare with evident sincerity that the grace of God without prosperity is enough for them. The feeling would be expressed by the Welsh proverb, 'Without God, without anything; with God, and enough.' Esau, with all his wealth, is not a typical Old Testament saint. He founded a nation whose portion was in this world, and it vanished. Jacob founded a nation which said, 'The LORD is my portion,' and it lives for ever.

UNITY.—Esau and Jacob are now good friends, yet they do not remain long in each other's company. The narrative indicates with fine literary skill and quiet humour the diversity of their temperaments. Jacob is, of course, too slow for Esau. The elder brother soon becomes restless; he hears the call of the wild; he wants to be up and scour the desert with 'the folk' who are with him. Mount Seir beckons him, the scene of all the pursuits and pleasures that give zest to life. If Jacob will come and visit him there, a royal welcome will

be accorded him; and no better time than now. Esau will go on ahead and make the pace, and let Jacob follow as fast as he can (v.[12]). The well-meaning proposal is worthy of the flying desert chieftain. But it takes Jacob's breath away. For, happily or unhappily, he is no wild huntsman, and never drove furiously in his life. It has ever been his wont to lead on softly. His only pace is 'the pace of the cattle' and 'the pace of the children.' The little ones are tender; the flocks and kine have sucklings; and if they are overdriven for a day they must die. Esau had not thought of that, and now it touches his kind heart to think of the lambs and little ones. They are not safe; Jacob needs a bodyguard; let him accept some of Esau's men—grand fellows, who will keep them from all danger. But Jacob assures him it is not necessary, while in his heart there is nothing he dreads so much as those wild Idumeans. 'So Esau returned that day on his way to Seir' (v.[16]). The brothers parted in peace, and it was best so. The ties of nature are strong, and blood is proverbially thicker than water; but nature needs to be reinforced by something higher, if her work is to be lasting. It is only when brothers see eye to eye on the great matters of faith, that their differences of taste and temperament sink into insignificance. Like the radii of a circle approaching a common centre, the nearer men come to God the nearer they come to one another.

VIII.

PURITY.

GEN. XXXIII. 18—XXXIV.

> 'Bear a lily in thy hand;
> Gates of brass cannot withstand
> One touch of that magic wand.'—LONGFELLOW.

PEACE.—'Jacob came in peace to the city of Shechem, which is in the land of Canaan' (33[18]). For the touch of 'peace' we are indebted to the Revised Version. Jacob's days of wrangling and strife, of fighting for his own hand and thwarting

the schemes of other men, are ended. At Gilead he has made a covenant of peace with Laban. At Peniel he has entered into the deep peace of God, and been reconciled to his brother. He next finds the people of Canaan peacefully disposed, and encamps among them in the quiet green valley of Shechem. Here he may at length taste the repose of a settled life. Having bought a 'parcel of ground'—a small estate—he builds an altar (vv.[19. 20]), and digs a well, destined to be one of the most sacred spots on earth, and to be known to the end of time as Jacob's Well. He may now abandon himself to the luxury of perfect rest. In Eastern lands, where strife is so common, peace is the all-inclusive blessing. To this day, when two people meet, the common salutation is, 'Peace be unto thee,' and the reponse, 'Unto thee be peace.' But peace may be purchased at too great a price. There is such a thing as 'a pestilent peace.' The rest which Jacob has found in the sweet vale of Shechem is fraught from the outset with elements of danger for his family. He encamps before the city (v.[18]). It is a heathen city, and the situation will not help his children to live the life of faith to which they are committed. The environment will not make it difficult for them to do evil and easy to do well. There is what is called good society at Shechem ; the palace sets an example of gaiety which is readily copied ; and the one thing believed to be worth living for under the shadows of Ebal and Gerizim is the pleasure of the senses. It is the pagan ideal all the world over. The 'best' society, even the society of princes, if it is not purged by the breath of God, is foul and corrupt society, in which peace is always treacherous, and mirth often ends in tragedy.

GIRLHOOD.—Jacob had an only daughter called Dinah. She was an innocent child when she came with her mother Leah from Haran to Canaan. The years of childhood quickly passed, and she was

> 'Standing with reluctant feet
> Where the brook and river meet,
> Womanhood and girlhood sweet.'

She might have been the guardian angel of her strong rough brothers, who loved her with a love that was quick to resent and strong to avenge even the shadow of an injury done to her. The might-have-beens of life are the saddest things in the world. Dinah had no talisman of faith or reverence or holy love powerful enough to save her from temptation, while there was something in her that seemed to court it. Eager and imaginative, thirsting for adventures, wistful to learn what raptures the world might have in store for her, 'she went out to see the daughters of the land,' who spent their butterfly life in flitting from pleasure to pleasure in those gardens of luxury. She was fascinated by the strange life to which she was introduced. New as it was, and liker a dream than a reality, she was at home in it. She found herself presented to a young prince, 'honoured above all the house of his father.' Something wild and lawless in her rose up to meet something wild and lawless in him. She listened to his wicked words, and fell. Honour, character, and peace gone, her sin must be expiated in a welter of blood. 'I adjure you,' cries a great lyric poet, 'I adjure you, O ye daughters of Jerusalem, that ye stir not up nor awaken love until he please.'[1] A moth fluttering round a flame, heedless of the singeing of its wings, darts feverishly into the heart of the fire, and quivers a little ere it dies. Why does its suicide so thrill our nerve of pity? Because there are so many human moths.

PURITY.—The word 'defiled,' which is thrice used in this narrative—a daughter, a sister defiled (vv.[5. 13. 27])—means desecrated. It is the same word which in a much later time made the beginning of the seventy-ninth Psalm so hard for a Hebrew to sing: 'O God, the heathen have entered Thy inheritance; Thy holy temple have they defiled.' The dishonour of womanhood and the desecration of the Holy of Holies are regarded with the same feelings, and described by the same word. Which is the greater

[1] Song of Songs 2^7 3^5 8^4

wrong? We instinctively feel that a temple should always be holy, and that God is somehow dishonoured when it is profaned, though we know that the sacredness which we impute to it is no more than a devout sentiment in our own minds, and that no intrinsic sacredness can attach to stone walls. But the human body is really holy; the breath which animates it is divine; every man and woman is a living temple of God. In all ages people have been using soft words for offences against the divine laws of purity, and there are a score of euphemisms which need not be set down here. But the Book which makes shameful things appear shameful, calling them by names which cannot be uttered without a blush, is the best guardian of the honour and peace of the home and the nation.

SILENCE.—When Jacob heard of his daughter's dishonour, 'he held his peace' (v.[5]). Hamor, the prince's father, came to commune with him (v.[6]), but Jacob was silent. His sons came home, and Hamor communed with them, and became quite garrulous (vv.[8-10]); but Jacob was silent. The prince came to plead his own cause, and talked and talked (vv.[11. 12]), 'and the sons of Jacob answered Shechem and Hamor his father,' but Jacob was silent. His power of speech and action was gone. His pride was humbled in the dust. A flesh wound makes a man cry aloud, but a vital wound stuns or paralyses him. When a man's eyes are dry and his lips unmoved, his heart may be breaking. There is no wrecker of the peace of homes like a gay voluptuary. And in this world there is a 'fatal doom by which every crime is made to be the agony of many innocent persons as well as of the single guilty one.'[1]

VIRTUE.—'The sons of Jacob were grieved, and they were very wroth,' because Shechem the son of Hamor 'had wrought folly in Israel, which thing ought not to be done' (v.[7]). 'Folly in Israel' was not so much an intellectual term, denoting want

[1] Hawthorne.

of understanding, as a moral term, denoting lack of conscience. It was one of those proverbial expressions which reflected the proud moral self-consciousness of the Hebrew nation. Folly in Israel was the most reprehensible kind of folly, because it was the desecration of an ideal. Folly in Egypt, Moab, or Tyre might be comparatively venial, the peoples in those lands being lesser breeds without the law. 'Ought' has a meaning for every nation, but folly in Israel was guilt of the deepest dye, because sin is dark in proportion to the glory of the religion which it violates. The strongest light casts the deepest shadow. Israel should be before every people in the world for the honour and virtue of its men, the purity and modesty of its women. The shameless person who committed folly in Israel was a profligate who defiled what was sacred to the LORD.

NUPTIALS.—Hamor came to Jacob to ask the hand of Dinah for his son. He came in a very complacent mood, not as an offender anxious to make atonement, but as a king willing to condescend and be gracious. He was prepared to back up his son's suit with a proposal which was likely to commend it—a complex scheme of intemarriages, settlements, gifts of land, and co-operation in trade (vv.[9. 10]). Let Hebrew and Canaanite draw together and forget their little differences. What better opportunity is likely to occur than the present for a social and political union, which will be a real union of hearts. This quiet valley will soon be the home of a federated and happy people. Love has come to make them one. Shechem and Dinah are the representatives of two races. The young people have played their part better than they know. Their parents may congratulate themselves, and their tribes rejoice.—Then the prince himself comes on the scene. He leaves politics to his father. At present he has no mind for such things. Dinah is in the matrimonial market, and he wishes to buy her. 'What ye shall say to me I will give. Ask me never so much dowry and gift, and I will give according as ye shall say to me: but give me the damsel to be my wife' (vv.[11. 12]). The

bribes and offers may be princely, but we see that all the sacredness has gone out of life. God's name is not found in this chapter (34), and how flat and stale everything becomes without Him! Other Hebrew brides might have the joyous consciousness that God had ordered their steps and was smiling upon their nuptials; but no one could imagine that He had any hand in Dinah's marriage, which, if it should ever take place, could only be of the earth, earthy.

LOVE.—But Dinah was never to be a prince's bride. Her brothers were too fiercely indignant to allow it. They were bent on taking a terrible revenge upon her lover. No doubt indignation against what is base and sinful is, in itself, a perfectly natural feeling. 'Anger is a sharp sword put into our hand by Nature herself; and she does not intend that that sharp sword should rust in its scabbard'[1] 'In the silent grief of Jacob, the father, and the dark and fierce anger of his sons, we can observe the external securities which God has placed around the honour and innocence of woman.'[2] 'The thief—the mean, sneaking, pilfering thief—is a man of honour compared with him who steals a woman's virtue, and robs a household of its peace.'[3] But righteous indignation passes all too easily into unrighteous, and when men take law and justice into their own hands, and become both judges and executioners, the results are terrible. Revenge is at the best only 'a wild kind of justice,' and very easily becomes a sheer and barbarous injustice. The vendetta knows no distinction between the guilty and the innocent. How many wars have been waged, how many massacres have been perpetrated, to avenge the injury done to some frail woman! It was a Hebrew girl's error that made blood to flow like water in the streets of Shechem. It was regarding one like her, in another land, that the question was asked:

> 'Was this the face that launched a thousand ships,
> And burned the topless towers of Ilium?'[4]

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[1] Butler. [2] Chalmers. [3] Guthrie. [4] Marlowe.

What do these and a thousand other instances teach us but that, as love is the greatest power in the world for good when it is pure and holy, so it is the greatest power for evil when it is impure and unholy? To violate its laws, to insult its spirit, is fatal, for 'the flashes thereof are flashes of fire, a very flame of the LORD.'

INFLUENCE.—The story of the foul treachery of Jacob's sons—their ostensible friendliness, their professed religious scruples, their proselytising zeal, all hiding a dastardly conspiracy—is one of the darkest tales in the Bible. Jacob speaks in the name of outraged humanity when he expresses to the ringleaders his horror of their crime. 'Ye have troubled me, and made me to stink among the inhabitants of the land' (v.[30]). If one thing on earth is more odious than another, it is villainy masked by hypocrisy. Beautiful flowers rank with poison, or 'whited sepulchres full of dead men's bones,' are what it suggests. Jacob saw to his dismay that a fatal misunderstanding would be created among the people of the land, which he would be powerless to remove. The Shechemites would say, 'Behold the man who builds altars and offers sacrifices to the LORD; his hands are red with our best blood; our curse be upon him and his altars!' A natural enough thing to say; yet, in truth, it is not religion, but the lack of religion, that is the root of all earthly evils. When sin is committed under the cloak of religion, the offence is indeed 'rank, and smells to heaven.' But true religion is in its spirit fragrant as a June night, sweet as the breath of a dew-washed garden. 'Awake, O north wind, and come thou south; blow upon my garden, that the spices thereof may flow out.'

IX.

RESTORATION.

GEN. XXXV.

'The errors cancelled, the dark shadows banished
In the glad light of a new world begun.'—G. MATHESON.

AWAKENING.—The thirty-fourth chapter of Genesis is Godless, the thirty-fifth is full of God. The former describes the Shechem life of the Hebrews, the latter their Bethel life. The contrast between a believer's and an unbeliever's life is scarcely more marked than the contrast between a half-hearted and a whole-hearted believer's life. There was a family altar even at Shechem (33^{20}), and nothing makes so surely for whatsoever things are pure and lovely as the worship of God. But the altar at Shechem somehow lost its influence over the worshippers, its power to restrain them from evil, to constrain them to goodness, to uplift and hallow their lives. The altar itself was profaned by their connivance at 'strange gods' ($v.^{2}$), by the proximity of heathenism, by the incursions of worldliness. Foul things were done around it which it was powerless to prevent. The altar lost its glory and its terror, and young lives which needed the supernatural to subdue and tame them were consequently allowed to run wild. No children are further from God than those of half-hearted believers. On the surface everything seemed to be right enough in the vale of Shechem, but under the surface everything was going far wrong. The crisis had to come. One day that hollow Shechem life was shaken as by an earthquake. Dinah's fall was followed by her brothers' abominable crime, and in the shock of that calamity Jacob heard the voice of God.

RESTORATION.—This voice, sounding in the depths of the man's soul, comes with a clear and startling call, bidding him go back to Bethel and dwell there ($v.^{1}$). He no sooner

realises the misery of the present than he remembers a happier past. His mind painfully contrasts the Then and the Now, the There and the Here. The brighter scenes which rush into his memory beget in him a bitter shame and an ardent longing. Bethel with its pure wind-swept spaces; Bethel with its awful divine presences; Bethel, the house of God and the gate of heaven; Bethel, to which his heart so wistfully turned in exile; Bethel, where divine promises were given which have all been kept; Bethel, where human vows were made which are still unpaid,—that is now the home of his soul. It is a full generation since he was there, but the long years have not unwoven the mystic ties which bind him to the sacred place. 'Back to Bethel,' 'Up to the House of God' become the watchwords which he gives his household (v.[1]). Realising at length how far he has declined, what can he do but acknowledge his error, turn backwards, toil upwards, and strive to recover his lost ideal? It may be hard to start afresh and struggle back into the right way, but it must be done though it should cost blood and tears. And it can be done by God's grace, for He pardons the penitent and gives them second chances. 'He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His own name's sake.'

ICONOCLASM.—Jacob prepared himself and his family for Bethel by a grand act of purification. First he commanded them to put away the strange gods that were among them (v.[2]). He had too long tolerated, and they had too long loved, what God hated. They must not go into God's presence with unclean and divided hearts. Hebrew history, even at its beginning, is a record of the wars of the LORD against idolatry. He sought whole-hearted, not half-hearted, worshippers; He could not but be jealous of the reverence, love, and obedience of His people. It was all along imperative on those who wished to serve Him to put away their 'no-gods,' to break them in pieces or grind them to powder, to bury them, or burn them, or cast them to the moles and bats. Ear-rings were also voluntarily given up (v.[4]).

These were not mere ornaments, but charms or amulets. They were used to woo good fortune and ward off evil influences. They were regarded as foolish people still regard horse-shoes. Their use always indicated a lack of faith in God, whose providence alone orders human lives. As they fostered wild delusions in the brain, the best thing that could be done with them was to bury them deep out of sight. Whenever people return to God with contrite hearts, whenever there is the breath of a new spiritual life among them, all morally wrong practices are discarded as naturally as old clinging leaves fall at the first touch of the vital sap of spring.

PURITY.—The Hebrews were also commanded to prepare for Bethel by purifying themselves and changing their raiment (v.[2]). The God into whose presence they were going was a God of purity, who required that His worshippers should be pure. They must not profane His sanctuary by any conscious defilement either of the flesh or spirit. 'Who shall ascend into the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in His holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart.'[1] Cleanliness was a part of godliness. The craving for nearness to God was accompanied by the instinctive feeling that not a shadow of impurity should stain the worshipper who approached the pure and awful Presence. Faith in God was the highest sanction for both æsthetic and moral purity. To worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness was to come before Him not merely in linen garments of snowy white, but with a spirit that harmonised with His holiness. 'The earnestness with which Old Testament saints conceived of the holiness and majesty of Israel's God, and of man's natural unworthiness, is indicated by the various kinds of washings and purifications, which were very numerous, and were beyond a doubt in frequent use even in ancient Israel. . . . In every case the purpose was to bring into accord the majesty of God and the consecration of those who are His people.'[2]

[1] Ps. 24[3, 4].   [2] Schultz.

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OBEDIENCE.—Nothing could be more radical than the moral reformation which Jacob requires his household to carry through; yet it is effected with surprising readiness and ease. Whatever he asks is given, whatever he commands is done (v.[4]). His power and authority are now as apparent as his previous weakness and helplessness. When he spoke to his sons in his own name, they showed him very scant respect (34[31]); but when he speaks to them in the name of God, they freely and heartily follow him in everything. The secret of authority and obedience becomes evident. When a father, having heard the voice of God speaking to himself, feels that he is under obligation to God, and is not afraid to assert his will, his sons and daughters realise with an instinctive awe that he has the right to require of them whatever he thinks good, and that their obedience to him will be their own salvation. The parent who knows that he has a holy call, not to make laws for his household, but to see that God's eternal laws are respected, will rarely fail to receive an implicit obedience and a reverential love. It is when a father recedes from his position as God's delegate, and his commands are seen to be merely his own caprices, that he quickly and naturally becomes an object of contempt even to his own children.

SACRIFICE.—The erection of a new altar on holier ground was at this time the great thought which occupied Jacob's mind. He heard a divine voice calling him to go up and make an altar at Bethel (v.[1]). He told his household of his purpose to make an altar at Bethel (v.[3]). And as soon as he came to Bethel with all the people that were with him, 'he built there an altar' (v.[7]). Nothing is said in Genesis about the theory or meaning of altars and sacrifices; but the fact that altars were erected and sacrifices offered is everywhere made prominent. The patriarchs built no houses for themselves; but wherever they pitched their moving tents they reared an altar to God. Four of Abraham's are mentioned, those at Shechem, Bethel, Hebron, and Moriah;

one of Isaac's, at Beersheba; and two of Jacob's, at Shechem and Bethel. On these altars they offered their sacrifices; with the cloud of incense-smoke their thoughts and desires rose to God; and they trusted that He would accept their offerings, grant their petitions, and pardon their sins. We no longer offer sacrifices of that kind to God; but we have not outgrown, and never can outgrow, the feelings which prompted them. To the end of time the awakened conscience of man will always gravitate towards atonement of some kind as its one possible rest.

FIDELITY. — Three deaths occurred after Jacob's departure from Shechem. Deborah died at Bethel (v.[8]). She was the last link with a distant past. She was Rebekah's nurse (v.[8]); she attended Rebekah's wedding (24[59]); and she lived to see Rebekah's children's children. She was honoured while she lived, and tears were shed for her when she died. The tree under which she was buried was called, in after times, Allonbakuth, the Oak of Weeping. Deborah is the faithful Hebrew maid-servant in Genesis, as Eleazar is the faithful man-servant. Instances of warm and lifelong sympathy between mistress and handmaid, as between master and servant, were of common occurrence in Hebrew homes. Among other ancient races it was extremely difficult, indeed hardly possible, to bridge over the gulf between the free and the servile classes. 'There is no fact more prominent in the Roman writers than the profound contempt with which they regarded slaves, not so much on account of their position, as on account of the character which that position had formed.'[1] But among the Hebrews the gulf was neither so wide nor so deep. There was no difference of colour to emphasise the class-distinction, and the religion of Israel both raised the status and refined the character of slaves. Because there were mistresses like Rebekah, there were maids like Deborah. The qualities which can expand and flourish in the servile condition—humility, obedience, gentleness, patience—won for many Hebrew servants

[1] Lecky.

esteem and affection in their lifetime, deep regret and fond remembrance when they were gone.

LOVE.—On the way from Bethel to Ephrath—*i.e.* Bethlehem—Jacob suffered a far sorer loss. Rachel, the beloved of his heart, was taken from him. The birth of her second son brought her short life to an end. It is the first recorded instance of death in childbirth. The writer of the narrative has the secret of that naked simplicity of style in which alone the tale of an agony too deep for passion, or tears, or earthly remedy can be told. There are only five verses, and they contain but a bare record of facts; yet this is 'one of the most beautifully touching passages in sacred writ.'[1] Jacob's love for Rachel began with tears of joy at the well of Haran. When she is so suddenly snatched from him by the hand of death, the springs of his emotion seem to be dried up. We do not read that he wept for her as Abraham wept for Sarah (23^2). His sorrow was too deep for tears. His wound never healed. Long after, when he was lying, far from his native land, in his gilded Egyptian chamber, awaiting his own end, he recalled that journey to Ephrath,—the halt by the way, the agonised suspense, the last words, the awful stillness,—and with touching simplicity he said, 'She died to my sorrow.'[2] Rachel was not faultless, but he remembered how she made the years pass like so many days, and to him she was always the dearest and best of women. She was Joseph's mother, and during the ten years in which she had no other child she lavished all her love on him; he learned nothing but good from her, and grew up to be one of the best men the world has seen. This fragile, beautiful, shortlived woman became to the Hebrews the type of suffering motherhood—their *mater dolorosa*, mother of sorrows. Life is a web of thin-spun texture, easily rent. Death sometimes takes the mother from the child, sometimes the child from the mother. In either case it is the mother who suffers. 'Rachel weeping for

[1] T. Chalmers. [2] Gen. 48^7 R.V. m.

her children' became a proverb in Israel. Jeremiah, most tender-hearted of prophets, heard her voice long after in Ramah,[1] as if her spirit still haunted the place; and when the birth of Jesus was followed by the massacre of the innocents at Bethlehem, it was Rachel's cry of anguish that was once more heard on the hills of Ephrath.[2] The pillar of Rachel's grave, set up by Jacob (v.[20]), became the monument of suffering motherhood, to which many another pilgrim, from whom God had taken away the desire of his eyes, turned aside to meditate on an irremediable sorrow with an unchangeable love.

> 'Deep as first love, and wild with all regret,
> O death in life, the days that are no more.'

Fain would one know what the literal fact of death really meant to these Hebrews. Was it simply the fading of beauty into ashes, of strength into dust? We are told here that it was a 'departure' (v.[18]). Rachael's death was her passing. At the stoppage of the fluttering pulse, and the glazing of the eye, the spirit took its flight somewhither. 'There is no death; what seems so was transition.' All else remained mystery, until at length a stronger faith asserted that death was a swift passing into the presence of God and the vision of His face.[3]

CONSOLATION.—Rachel had thought of a happy name for her child, as every mother does, before it was born. But no one knows that name. It was never spoken. Another name took its place. 'Call him Benoni,' the dying mother said, almost with her last breath. Benoni means 'son of my sorrow.' It quivers with the infinite heart-ache of this mother of sorrows. 'Give me children, or else I die,' was her prayer (30[1]). Her prayer was answered—and she died. Benoni was a tenderly pathetic word, but to Jacob it was an impossible name for his child. It would have cut him too near the quick every time he used it. He makes a brave effort to escape his grief. What he sees is a

[1] Jer. 31[15]. [2] Matt. 2[18]. [3] Job 19[26, 27], Ps. 16[11] 49[15].

strong babe who has just come from the hand of God, a bringer of joy who will not let others weep.

> 'Sorrow's self before thy smile
> Smiles and softens.'

He resolves that his child shall have a happy name after all to go through the world with. He calls him Benjamin, 'son of my right hand.' His people will have reason to thank him for that name. No doubt there is an irony in human fate, but we need not suppose that it is a bitter irony. This life which God has given us is wonderfully sweet at the core. The child who began his career by killing his mother, and grew up to be the 'ravening wolf' of Jacob's family (49^{27}), became the ancestor of such splendid types of manhood as King Saul and Saul of Tarsus.

REVERENCE.—Jacob went from Bethlehem to Mamre, where his father was still living. Isaac had long before prepared himself for his end, but his placid temperament prolonged the peaceful evening of his life, and he saw his son's sons ere he died. 'One is pleased,' says one of the best writers on Genesis, 'to meet once more with good, mild, venerable Isaac. There is no scripture character whom I love more to dwell upon, or in whom I find more of that gentleness and repose in the contemplation of which there is something inexpressibly soothing and delightful.'[1] 'Old and full of days,' Isaac was at length 'gathered unto his people' in the unseen world, and his two sons, brought together once more by the call of death, laid his body in the field of Machpelah, beside the ashes of his father and mother. Jacob used to speak of enjoying the protection of 'the Fear of Isaac' (31^{42}), and he made a covenant in the name of 'the Fear of his father Isaac' (31^{53}). The archaic word translated 'Fear,' and thus applied to God, indicates the profound reverence which was habitual to Isaac's mind. His life was one of quiet and almost unbroken prosperity,

[1] Chalmers.

but his message to after ages might have been expressed in the words, 'The LORD of hosts, let Him be your Fear, and let Him be your Dread.'[1] It was, of course, no slavish fear of God that he cherished. It was that reverential awe, that sense of the seriousness of living daily in the presence of God, which really increases man's happiness a hundredfold by guarding him from everything hurtful and unholy.

> 'But present still, though now unseen,
> When brightly shines the prosperous day,
> Be thoughts of Thee a cloudy screen
> To temper the deceitful ray.'[2]

X.

DREAMS.

GEN. XXXVII.

> 'Dreamer devout, by vision led
> Beyond our guess or reach.'—KIPLING.

IDEALS.—'In order that the ideals of a race should acquire their full force, it is necessary that they should be represented or illustrated in some great personalities who by the splendour and beauty of their careers could fascinate the imagination of men.'[3] Joseph is, by common consent, regarded as the fine flower of the ancient Hebrew race and religion. His life-story, told with a natural grace that more than matches perfect art, was a precious heritage of the Hebrew people. Long ere it was committed to writing, it must have done noble service as a tradition, firing the imaginations, touching the hearts, and bracing the wills of many generations of thoughtful and generous young men. Only a great nation could create or cherish such an ideal, at once so princely and so popular. The hero's chequered career throws him into an immense variety of situations, which give

[1] Is. 8[13]. [2] Scott. [3] Lecky.

free play to all his gifts and graces. Dreams and realities, dangers and deliverances, temptations and triumphs, toils and successes, undeserved ignominy and merited glory, are his portion. He owes much to nature. His physical charm is described in exactly the same words as his mother's;[1] and he is dowered with talents which make him a natural leader of men. But he derives still more of his power from his faith. It is the fear of the LORD that keeps his head steady and his heart sound amid all the trials of youth, the labours of manhood, the fascinations of worldly rank and power. Though his story has interwoven with it the airy and unsubstantial threads of dreams, its pattern is nothing but the common stuff of everyday life. As a tale of strong unwavering faith it fulfils its purpose by teaching us how our own lives may be transfigured by being lived in the light of God's countenance.

TRUTH.—Is the first thing that is told about Joseph to his credit or discredit? When he was seventeen years of age he was in the fields watching his father's flock with his half-brothers, Dan and Naphtali, Gad and Asher, and he 'brought an evil report of them to their father' (37^2). He incurred the odium of being a tale-bearer. Because his brothers regarded him in that light, must we, too, so regard him? If a boy mischievously schemes to bring his comrades into disgrace, if he spies out their actions with the intention of peaching upon them, if he takes pleasure in lowering them in the eyes of a superior, he is of course a sneak, and deserves to be heartily detested. Malice is the meanest motive that can actuate any mind. 'The words of a tale-bearer are (to himself) dainty morsels,'[2] but the many ugly names — whisperer, backbiter, detractor — with which a meddlesome informer is branded show how offensive his conduct is to others. 'Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people.'[3] But must we not in justice regard Joseph

[1] Gen. 29^{17} 39^6 'beautiful' and 'comely' translating the same word.
[2] Prov. 18^8.
[3] Lev. 19^{16}.

in another light? His conscience is tender and his heart pure; and when he is out all day with his brothers in the fields, he is startled and shocked at their abominable conduct. He hears them speak wicked words, and he learns how vile boys can be. They know very well that they are utterly wrong, and they demand of him that secrecy which is always congenial to vice. They scorn his scruples, his warnings, his entreaties. They threaten him with violence if he says a word about their excesses and follies to their father. If he does not hold his tongue between his teeth, they will make it the worse for him. Now, if he is to obey his conscience what is he to do? He must speak out, whatever the consequences may be. He will be a coward if he is silent. As it is rightly regarded as a crime to conceal the outbreak of a fever or a plague, so it is a sin not to do everything in one's power to stem the tide of sin. One of the headmasters of Harrow thus addresses his boys: 'You may be conscious of evil which exists in the school. You have found it out. Nobody else has found it out. You wish it were somebody else's duty, and not yours, to protest against it; but you, you are the only boy who can put it down. You shrink from speaking against it. It is a base feeling. You shrink from telling about it. It is an honourable feeling. What are you to do? My boys, speak out like a man. Say that it must not be, it shall not be; and that if it is not stopped, you will bring it to light. Never mind what happens to you. "If you perish you perish"; but the school is saved, or the house, and you have saved it.'[1]

LOVE.—We are told that 'Israel loved Joseph more than all his children' (v.[3]). He had twelve sons, and they had an equal need of his affection and an equal claim to it; but ten of them were impoverished because a favourite son received more than his share. Jacob did not love Joseph too well; that was impossible. His fault did not consist in loving one of his sons more, but

[1] Dr. Welldon.

in loving the others less. 'In the little world in which children live there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt as an injustice. It may be only small injustice that the child is exposed to; but the child is small and its world is small.'[1] It was, no doubt, natural for Jacob to have a deep, fond love for Rachel's son, and to decide to make him his heir. Nor is it possible for a father to regard all his children with precisely the same kind of love. Some are brighter, more amiable, more companionable than others, and give him more joy. Some are unbelievers, and he regards them with a love of yearning pity, with a great deep longing for their salvation. Others are believers, and he regards them with a love of pure satisfaction and delight. But he must never cease to hold the balance evenly; and if he loves one at the expense of the others the results are inevitably evil. It is proverbial that a favourite has no friend. Joseph's brothers saw that their father loved him more than all the rest of them, and 'they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him.' Jacob did not see what harm his partiality was doing, and made bad worse by presenting his son with a splendid robe as a mark of distinction. This was not 'a coat of many colours,' but a long, white, light robe of delicate and beautiful texture, such as was worn by men of rank and wealth, who did not require to soil themselves with manual labour. The brothers had to wear clothes of a coarser stuff, and to be like their work. 'Nowhere were distinctions of dress held in higher estimation than in the ancient East; a man's rank was known by his dress.'[2] If this favouritism did not give a tinge of self-consciousness to the handsome, gifted boy — we are not told that it did—it was almost a miracle. It has been finely said that 'there is no friendship so intimate as that of a good father with a good child';[3] but if that intimacy implies a forgetfulness or neglect of other natural ties, both father and son are certain to find that nature does not forgive.

[1] Dickens. [2] Sayce. [3] Dante.

Dreams.—Joseph as a boy is a dreamer of dreams. There is, of course, something grotesque in his dreams. It is only in dreams that sheaves become animated; only in dreams that the sun appears in company with the moon and stars; only in dreams that a dear dead mother is seen in her old place within the family circle. And certainly many dreams must be dismissed as senseless and morbid. Yet great teachers[1] have exhorted their disciples to study their dreams on the ground that they reveal the latent tendencies of the mind. The dreams of happy childhood, bright visions of the future, wonders in the halls of fancy, projections of the soul's dim instincts and vague longings, are really prophetic. They are sent to beckon us the way we are to go. They are a divine inspiration to effort and hope. 'These hints, dropped as it were from sleep and night, let us use in broad day.'[2] It is God, the soul's Maker, who kindles those glowing hopes in it, and gives every child a dower of happy dreams. Out of some strange subconscious region of the mind they come stealing now into our sleeping, now into waking thoughts. If any youth misses them, the fault is not his Maker's. Joseph differs from other young men chiefly in cherishing his dreams; and dreams believed in have a way of coming true. Joseph has an instinct for rule and power. A life of sweet repose and meditative calm, such as Isaac lived on the border of the wilderness, far from the noise of men, would have been no life for him. A certain high ambition is the motive force of his being, which he is powerless to resist. The cast of his mind is daring and aspiring; he believes in his sheaf and his star; he dreams of power and dominion. The thoughts that ferment in his youthful imagination will gradually clear themselves, and the dreamer would have the opportunity of proving himself a doer. He reminds us of Wordsworth's familiar saying, that 'the child is father to the man,' and of his Happy Warrior who all his life acts 'on the plan which pleased his childish thought.' Schiller's message to every

[1] *E.g.* Plato. [2] Emerson.

young man is, 'Tell him to reverence the dreams of his youth.'

CONSCIENCE.—The ties of brotherhood should bind the members of a family together till their lives' end. But the strongest and most sacred ties may first be strained and then snapped. Home-life is not always gentle and peaceful and helpful. For lack of mutual forbearance, the spirit of give and take, self-suppression and kind good humour, the light of love burns low and is finally extinguished. This chapter contains the natural history of a crime committed by brothers against a brother. The root of the trouble was envy (v.[11]). Joseph's felt distinction, added to his father's foolish partiality, fretted and galled his brothers. His many apparent advantages—superior talents, nobler character, happier dreams, finer apparel—maddened them against him. 'Envy is acknowledged to be the most ungenerous, base, and wicked passion that can enter the breast of man.'[1] It looks at goodness with malevolence; it cannot think of a brother's happiness without misery.

> 'Base envy withers at another's joy,
> And hates the excellence it cannot reach.'[2]

Joseph's brothers hated him (v.[4]), and their hatred went on increasing (v.[5]). They could not speak peaceably to him. Hot anger was in their hearts, dark frowns were on their brows, fierce words on their tongues. They nursed their sullen wrath till it could not but burst into a flame. The fateful opportunity came—sooner or later it always comes.

> 'The sight of means to do ill deeds
> Oft maketh ill deeds done!'[3]

Joseph visited his brothers in a lonely place, where there was no human eye to observe what they did. He was at last delivered into their hands. They sprang upon him like wild beasts.

[1] William Law. [2] Thomson. [3] Shakespeare.

They would slay him, and see what would then become of his dreams. They stripped him of his princely robe, and flung him into a pit to die. Heedless of 'the distress of his soul' (42^{21}), they sat down to eat bread, fiercely exultant. It was their hour of triumph. They were avenged. The dreamer would no more come between them and happiness. Yet they had just enough of conscience left to keep them from being absolutely at their ease. After all, the dreamer was their brother. That might not be a reason for showing him any kindness, but it was a reason for being prudent about their own safety. Fratricide was perhaps too risky a business. The stain of a brother's blood has always been a nasty thing, and the remorse of Cain had better be avoided. But if conscience is afraid of blood, it will not be troubled at the thought of bondage. If capital punishment is too severe a penalty for dreaming, hard labour for life is not too much. So 'the patriarchs, moved by envy, sold Joseph into Egypt.' It was a crime which in later times became a capital offence. 'He that stealeth a man and selleth him . . . shall surely be put to death.'[1] Joseph's brethren did not at first realise the greatness of their sin. Their literal avoidance of blood sufficiently appeased their conscience for a time. But the day came when a voice said to them, 'His blood is required' (42^{22}), and they knew that the requirement was absolutely just. The fine distinction between scarlet sins and crimson sins is of unspeakably small account when an awakened conscience makes us cry out for the whiteness of snow.

TRUTH.—Wherever we find unkindness we are almost certain to find untruth. 'Kindness and truth' are wedded in Genesis (24^{49} 47^{29}); they naturally draw to each other everywhere; there is a pre-established harmony between them. The same is true of their opposites. Jacob's sons, having sold their young brother, made it next to impossible for themselves to speak the truth.

[1] Ex. 21^{16}.

They had to concoct a story to account for his disappearance, and it was as audacious and cruel a falsehood as was ever uttered by human lips. They dabbled their brother's coat in goats' blood, brought it to their father, and asked him to say if he thought it was his son's or not. Naturally they avoid saying 'our brother's,' for brotherhood lives only with love and truth. But they give clear and circumstantial evidence of their innocence, and when they have seen their father's looks of anguish, they are surely satisfied at length. What more can they want? Their revenge is sweet and complete. Yet even the most cruel and callous men cannot help having a divine ideal of love and truth hidden in their souls. Their very lies are told in deference to a law of kindness which they instinctively honour. They would blush to appear to be what they have actually become. God made men so different, that evil never dares to be sincere. It always borrows the colours and wears the garb of innocence. It has a whole lifetime of hard labour in keeping up appearances. Hypocrisy is the tribute which all bad men have to pay to the ideal of goodness.

COMFORT.—When Jacob looks at the coat bedaubed with blood, a horror of great darkness falls upon his mind. Ghastly pictures rise before his imagination. The claws and teeth of some ferocious beast have drawn this life-blood from the veins of his darling son. Joseph is without doubt torn in pieces (v.[33]). His mangled body lies in some horrid lair. Jacob rends his garments. His anguish is pitiful. His hopes are crushed. The light of his life is gone out. He puts on sackcloth, and mourns for his son many days. 'He refuses to be comforted' (v.[35]). It is no wonder that his sons cannot comfort him. They deal him a staggering blow, and then bid him not be too much cast down. How can there be any ring of sincerity in their words of consolation? But we are disappointed to find that Jacob derives so little comfort from his faith in God. He does not realise that 'if a person weeps and mourns excessively for a lost

relative, his grief becomes a murmur against the will of God.'[1] When the mind is overwhelmed with grief it does not reason logically. Jacob sees nothing before him but a set grey life, and then the dreariness of Sheol. He will follow his son into the darkness. His faith in God is not so grandly steadfast as that of Abraham, who believed that

> 'Even the hour that darkest seemeth
> Will His changeless goodness prove.'

Jacob looks too much at the gloomy face of death, too little at the glorious face of God. Men of stronger faith have learned to answer even such questions as, 'Is this thy son's coat?' without rending their garments and refusing to be comforted. Richard Cameron's head and hands were carried to his old father, Allan Cameron. 'Do you know them?' asked the cruel men who wished to add grief to the father's sorrow. And he took them on his knee, and bent over them, and kissed them, and said, 'I know them! I know them! They are my son's, my dear son's.' And then, weeping and yet praising, he went on, 'It is the Lord! Good is the will of the Lord, who cannot wrong me and mine, but has made goodness and mercy to follow us all our days.'[2]

XI.

VIRTUE.

GEN. XXXIX. 1-20.

> 'True religion is the queen of the virtues and the destroyer of the vices.'
> DANTE.

FELLOWSHIP.—It is a critical time in a young man's life when he must leave the home in which he has breathed the atmosphere of true religion, and go among strangers who have not the fear of God before their eyes. He is tempted to take on the colour

[1] Talmud. [2] *Men of the Covenant.*

of his surroundings, to do just as he finds others doing. But if he has faith for a safeguard, he will not be so soft and pliant. The consciousness of God's presence is the secret of victory. The story of Joseph's life in Egypt begins with the quiet statement that the LORD was with him (v.[2]). This is repeated three times in the chapter (vv.[3. 21. 23]), and the reiteration indicates its importance. It was sometimes said among the Hebrews that Jahveh's presence was confined to the land of Canaan, to the streams and hills and groves of the country of their birth, while He left other territories to be ruled by other gods, so that when any of His people crossed the border they were beyond His reach and care. This was a popular notion which the writers of Genesis nowhere countenance. They say that the LORD was with Jacob in Syria and with Joseph in Egypt, and that in these lands the same God directed the minds of such men as Laban and Pharaoh. He was Joseph's Guardian in his exile. The God whom the Hebrew boy had learned to worship and trust in Canaan was with him, not as a mere memory or influence, but as a real Presence, in the land of Egypt and the house of bondage. Joseph was not a forgotten waif, uncared for by God. In the stately mansion of the captain of the guard, in the gloomy dungeon, and in the royal palace, he realised the nearness of God; and this was the secret of whatever was noble and beautiful in his character and career. The God of the Hebrews was not a shadowy Being, far remote and scarcely known, but a real present Help in time of need. We sometimes imagine that science has increased the difficulty of believing that God is actually with us in this world. Our growing knowledge of the vastness of God's universe makes us think of Him as far, far away. The God who was with Joseph does not seem to care for us. We fear that He has forsaken the earth where His guiding and guarding presence was once so vividly realised. But our fears are irrational. 'It is our power of imagination which is at fault, when it shocks us to bring Him from the throne of the universe to be the Father of the fatherless and the Guide of the

wanderer. It is not reason. Why should He, who made and sees and upholds all things, *not* care for the least thing that His love and wisdom thought good to make?'[1]

WORK.—With the worst possible intentions, Joseph's brethren did him the best possible service. His successful career dated from the day on which they sold him as a slave. At first his soul was in great distress (42^{21}), and no wonder; for 'there is no despair so absolute as that which comes with the first moments of our first great sorrow, when we have not yet known what it is to have suffered and be healed, to have despaired and to have recovered hope.'[2] But the young mind, aided by health and hope, has a wonderful power of recovery from sorrow, and Joseph's bitter misfortune soon proved to be a real blessing. In Egypt he began the strenuous life. The dreamer became perforce a toiler. At home he was in danger of being pampered and spoiled, of thinking more of honour than of duty, of living a life that was merely ornamental. In Egypt he must earn his bread by the sweat of his brow. At first it was cruelly hard to have to work as the servant of a stranger who had bought him in the market like a beast of burden. He had to put a constraint on himself, to brush aside tears, and forget. But labour developed his character, drew out all his talents, and became ere long such a joyous necessity that he remained a strenuous worker to the end of his life. He did not forget his dreams, but he learned to combine the ideal with the practical. It is good that a young man should see visions,[3] but it is also 'good for a man that he bear the yoke in his youth.'[4]

STEWARDSHIP.—The story of Joseph's success in Potiphar's house was well worth telling. It is important to observe that there was nothing peculiar about his position as a servant. It

[1] Dean Church. [2] George Eliot.
[3] Joel 2^{28}. [4] Lam. 3^{27}.

was only a daily round of common tasks that he had to fulfil. But the presence of a man with an uncommon spirit redeems every situation from commonplaceness. The Divine Presence makes the difference in the man himself. As often as it is said that the LORD was with Joseph, it is added that he prospered. 'He was a prosperous man' (v.[2]), and 'the LORD made all that he did to prosper in his hand' (vv.[3, 23]). Being intelligent, industrious, and trustworthy, ready to forget himself and be absorbed in the interests of another, quick to learn the language, manners, and customs of Egypt, he won his master's favour, and was soon promoted to the highest position in Potiphar's house. As steward he had charge of the whole household, and his master had such faith in him that he asked him no questions (vv.[4, 6]). Joseph did not abuse his master's confidence. He was as conscientious as if his master's eye were always upon him, and as if he had to render a strict account of whatever he did. He was the best of servants, because he was always serving God as well as man. His faith created in him a keen sense of honour. His daily conduct was the practical expression among men of his sense of obligation to God. Such a servant has always been counted a treasure, and we are not surprised that 'the LORD blessed the Egyptian's house for Joseph's sake' (v.[5]).

VIRTUE.—The immortal story of Joseph's victory over temptation is one of those vivid tales which give the morality of the Hebrews the immense power of a personalised ideal. Mohammed calls it 'a most excellent story,' and spoils it in the retelling. It is told in Genesis with severe simplicity, yet it moves us like a drama of high and passionate thoughts, and whispers to us the secret of all pure and holy living. It was God's own will that Joseph should be tempted. 'The word of the LORD tried him.'[1] No one can live long in this world without being tempted, for it is full of gross and of subtle allurements. God

[1] Ps. 105[19].

often allows some fierce temptation to make a crisis in a young man's moral life. The trial will determine whether his past innocence has been the result of moral strength or of social seclusion. Many a man gets credit for goodness simply because he has not yet encountered a real temptation. Clearly, however, temptation is in itself no sin. 'It is only when a man sees temptation coming and goes out to meet it, welcomes it, plays with it, and invites it to be his guest, that it passes from temptation into sin. Until he has opened the door of his own accord and let it in, he has done no wrong. He has been a tempted man—not a sinful man.'[1] It is equally plain that the strongest temptation cannot justify us in sinning. When a guilty person pleads to God, as he is so apt to do, 'The woman gave me, and I did eat,' he is offering the meanest as well as the flimsiest of excuses. No outward temptation has power to seduce us unless we choose to allow it. What injures the soul is not the outward fiery solicitation, but the inner response. The power to say 'No' in the critical moments of life is a man's salvation. 'My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not.'[2] There is no sin except in the surrender of the will, and no real virtue except in the resistance of the soul.

TRIAL.—Joseph had a charm which was partly physical, partly spiritual. His beauty was his mother's gift. Rachel and her son were both 'beautiful in face and form' (29^{17} 39^{6}). He had the clear Hebrew complexion which was so wonderful in the eyes of the darker Egyptians. He had the magnetism and power of a richly endowed nature. He had graceful and winsome manners. He had the rarer gift of a beautiful soul, which communicates itself in an indescribable way to the light of the eyes, the tone of the voice, the touch of the hand. Apart from moral goodness and spiritual grace, physical beauty is apt to be a fatal gift, fatal to its possessor and to whoever casts eyes upon it—a curse, not a blessing. Young and beautiful, innocent

[1] Henry Drummond. [2] Prov. 1^{10}.

and untried, Joseph suddenly finds himself tempted to be impure. His mistress lets herself fall in love with him, and uses all her arts to seduce him, making her house a place of evil enchantments for the young Hebrew. One of our poets tells how his youthful hero is brought 'through the cave of Mammon and the tower of earthly bliss, that he might see and know and yet abstain.'[1] 'The righteous God trieth the hearts';[2] and 'blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for when he is approved he shall receive the crown of life.'[3]

VICTORY.—Three things kept Joseph pure--duty, honour, and faith. First, temptation assailed him when he was doing 'his work' (v.[11]). It found him where he should be and as he should be. He did not go a step out of his way to meet it, and when it came to him his mind was preoccupied. He was not taken off his guard. Intent on other and better things, he was safe. The temptation which comes to meet us, however great it may be, is not half so difficult to overcome as the temptation which we go to seek. We are strong so long as we are in our proper element, weak only when we are out of it. Faithful and honest work, which keeps head and heart and hand busy, is a perfect shield against temptation. The vacant, inquisitive, wandering mind is the thing to dread. 'Contamination taints the idler first.'[4] 'Every man's task is his life-preserver.'[5] Second, honour keeps Joseph right. He does not forget for a moment that he is a steward, to whom a high trust has been committed. An exceptionally kind master has raised him to greatness (v.[9]), has put all things in his hands, has confided in him implicitly. To abuse such a master's kindness, to return him evil for good, would be unspeakably mean; it would be to deserve the name of traitor. A nice sense of what is right and just is a motive infinitely higher than the dread of consequences. Even if there were no punishment to fear, the loss

[1] Spenser. [2] Ps. 7[9]. [3] Jas. 1[12].
[4] Clough. [5] Emerson.

of self-respect would be to an honourable man an exquisite torture.

> 'Say, what is honour? 'Tis the finest sense
> Of justice which the human mind can frame,
> Intent each lurking frailty to disclaim
> And guard the way of life from all offence
> Suffered or done.'[1]

Third, Joseph is saved by faith. God has given us many high and pure motives to induce us to do the right—filial affection, the memory of home, friendship, gratitude, self-respect, yet they would not be sufficient to carry us safely through the strongest and subtlest temptations of life unless they were transcended by a still higher motive—the sense of responsibility to God Himself. Our panoply would not be complete unless we had over all the shield of faith. Joseph has a light from heaven flashed upon his temptation, a strong, welcome, glorious light, in which he sees it to be the hideous thing it is, and he stands aghast at it. He does not say, 'this folly,' or 'this vice,' or 'this crime,' though each of these words would be so far right. He goes both deeper and higher; he shrinks from 'this great wickedness,' he shudders at 'sin against God.' If he were to yield he would be a fool, a voluptuary, a criminal. True; but, above all, he would be a sinner against God. And that is what he will not, he cannot, be. In the tempests and whirlwinds of passion it is of small account to talk of injuring our own and other people's souls; it is the fear of God that is our salvation.

SENSIBILITY.—A natural abhorrence rises in every young mind at the first approach of temptation. We shrink from it as a child from a toad. This instinctive repulsion should never be weakened. It should always be painful to us to think, and still more to speak, of vice. There are sins about which we should never talk willingly or calmly. Nature protests against them by mantling the innocent cheek with hot blushes at the mention of them. 'It is a shame even to speak of those things.'[2] The first

[1] Wordsworth. [2] Eph. 5^{12}.

thing which all corrupters of youth try to do is to make vice seem beautiful, to array its foulness in fair colours, to conceal its real and hateful self. One of the outstanding merits of the Bible is that, like Ithuriel's spear, it makes shameful things appear shameful.

> 'For no falsehood can endure
> Touch of celestial temper, but returns
> Of force to its own likeness.'[1]

It is the Bible that makes the moral sense pure and strong—a light to guide, a voice to warn, a spirit to control. 'Keep thy conscience continually tender, and then it will check the first appearance of sinful passions, and will smart at the mere thought of sin.'[2] It is the Bible that keeps alive 'that sensibility of principle, that chastity of honour, which feels a stain like a wound.'[3]

PURITY.—The God whom Joseph worshipped was of purer eyes than to behold iniquity, and could not look upon sin. He was a righteous God, who loved righteousness. And when Joseph felt the hot breath of temptation in his face, he took refuge in God; he recollected the presence of God; he uttered the name of God.[4] He realised that to sin against a woman was to sin against God. Beyond the poor seductress' face he saw another Face, full of loveliness, which he dared not grieve or offend. It was not so much with Potiphar's wife or with Potiphar that he had to do, as with God. All human beings are made in God's image (1^{26}); all human society is His creation; and to injure anything that is sacred to Him, is to strike at Himself. This was the thought which made sin an intolerable thing to the Hebrews. God's splendid purity—the terrible crystal[5]—shrivelled up all unholy lusts. 'Thou hast set our secret sins in the light of Thy Face.'

> 'The love which draws us nearer Thee
> Is hot with wrath to them.'[6]

FLIGHT.—Joseph 'fled forth' from the presence of his

[1] Milton. [2] Richard Baxter. [3] Burke.
[4] So Jesus in Matt. $4^{4, 7, 10}$. [5] Ezek. 1^{22}. [6] Whittier.

temptress in shame and fear. He escaped as a bird from the snare of the fowler. All wise men counsel flight from allurement to sins of passion. It is fatal to dally with temptation, to deliberate when conscience is clear. When the young Greek was in the enchanted isle of Calypso, his mentor cried, 'Fly, Telemachus, fly!' The Hebrew spirit is still more Puritan, the Christian most of all. 'Flee youthful lusts.'[1] Some modern teachers, who have given up the Hebrew and Christian faith in a personal God, say that nature knows nothing of chastity,[2] and advise young men to take their licence in the field of time. Others encourage them to sin, that they may see life and gain a knowledge of the world—an astonishing means of self-improvement. 'Is any man,' Newman quietly asks, 'a better man for becoming a selfish beast?' To cast away the pearl of purity is at the same time to forfeit truth, faithfulness, love, justice, holiness—to make life poor indeed. No sin more swiftly and surely ruins the soul than unclean passion. One of the masters in Israel gives us a picture of what a young man becomes when he surrenders to the temptress:

> 'With her much fair speech she causes him to yield,
> With the flattery of her lips she forces him away.
> He goes after her straightway,
> As an ox goes to the slaughter . . .
> As a bird hastens to the snare,
> And knows not that it is for his life . . .
> Let not thy heart incline to her ways,
> Go not astray in her paths . . .
> Her house is the way to hell,
> Going down to the chambers of death."[3]

CONSCIENCE.—The temptress fawns and smiles and flatters one day, hisses and frowns and curses the next. Milton stated this fact in one awful sentence when he said that lust dwells hard by hate. Potiphar's wife, being immoral, was also malignant. Madam Wanton's languid, amorous eyes soon begin to blaze with dangerous fire, and her lascivious lips distil the

[1] 2 Tim. 2^{22}. [2] *E.g.* Renan. [3] Prov. 7^{21-27}.

poison of asps. Her quick brain suggests a delicious revenge upon the Hebrew innocent. She will pose as a pure-minded wife whom he has tried to injure. She will not be sorry to see her husband — of whom she speaks with scant respect (v.[14]) — beside himself with rage against his favourite servant, and hopes he will either smite off his head or at least give him prison fare for the rest of his life.

> 'Heaven has no rage like love to hatred turned,
> Nor hell a fury like a woman scorned.'

Yet even Potiphar's wife is not without a conscience. She has a clear perception of the rightness of virtue and the wrongness of vice. She knows well enough that she is utterly wrong in tempting a man to sin, and that he would be equally wrong in tempting her. She knows that she is right in expressing a horror of vice, and demanding its punishment. Even when the reality of virtue is absent, the semblance is carefully displayed—a pathetic tribute which even the basest souls cannot help paying to the divine idea of purity which God has created in them.

MORALITY.—Thoughtful teachers in every age have confessed that moral teaching looks to religious teaching for its inspiration, its power, and its final justification. George Eliot says of one of her characters that his strength lay 'in his fervent belief in an Unseen Purity to which uncleanliness and lying were an abomination.' Now this was the strength of the Hebrew race as a whole—that they practically identified religion and morality. Among them a right faith was the inspiration of a right life; creed was the mould of conduct and character; the fear of the LORD created an atmosphere in which impure thoughts and unholy desires died a natural death. Among them the decadence of morality was never due to anything but a decadence of religion, and every ethical revival sprang from a religious revival. They had the highest conceivable sanction of virtue, because the God whom they adored, being Himself morally

beautiful, was the Archetype of purity, righteousness, truth, and love. Among pagan races, theology was not less strikingly divorced from morality than among the Hebrews it was conjoined with it. Jupiter, the highest god of Greece, was notoriously adulterous. Krishna, the favourite god of the Hindoos, is the incarnation of abandoned immorality. But it is impossible to think of the God of the Hebrews as other than spotlessly pure; and this is what makes their religion, as perfected by Christ, the absolute religion. Among all the grand ideals which the world has once won and can never afford to let slip, the transcendent one is the vision of a pure and holy God. All utilitarian sanctions of morality are shadows in comparison with that sanction which is appealed to in the young Hebrew's question, 'How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?'

XII.

INSPIRATION.

GEN. XXXIX. 20–XLI. 40.

'God has a people whom He whispers in the ear.'—BROWNING.

SILENCE.—Joseph was the victim of a cruel calumny. A woman aspersed his good name, and her story was believed. If any shadows of suspicion crossed her husband's mind, he could not afford to regard them. Potiphar's wife must be above suspicion. He must assume that his Hebrew steward, whose coming had brought such prosperity to his house, had after all made moral shipwreck. Potiphar's wrath was kindled (39^{19}), and he took Joseph and 'put him into the prison, the place where the king's prisoners were bound' (v.^{20}). No trial was granted. Being a slave, Joseph was condemned unheard. The innocent had to suffer instead of the guilty. Bearing shame and scoffing, he stood condemned in her place. 'But the LORD was with Joseph,' and this made him content to suffer

in silence. He was one of the first to find that God's presence almost changes a prison into a palace. To the very young injustice always seems strange; it brings anguish to their souls (42^{21}); they cannot reconcile themselves to it. But as they grow older it begins to appear customary and almost natural. We live in a tangled world, and while we try to do absolute justice to others, we must not despair if something less is done to us. Joseph was still well under thirty, but he had already learned the lesson. Amiel goes so far as to say that 'to hope for justice in this world is a sign of sickly sensibility. We must learn to do without it.'[1] There are some whose wrongs so embitter them that they never smile again. There are others whose wrongs so madden them that their hands are raised to heaven in fierce upbraiding. But there is a nobler way. It has always been the mark of a hero to say, 'Blame I can bear, but not blameworthiness.' To endure reproach and persecution, and let no murmur escape the lips and no bitterness enter the soul—that is true greatness, that is Godlikeness. 'The Lord was with Joseph' in prison, and the peace of his own spirit was the proof of it. 'A good man's glory is the witness his own quiet conscience bears. With a good conscience you have continual joy. It can bear much, and amid troubles is exceeding glad; but the bad conscience is always restless and afraid. . . . Patience and lowliness in days of trouble are more pleasing to God than piety in days of prosperity.'[2]

> 'Oh, fear not in a world like this,
> And thou shalt know ere long,
> Know how sublime a thing it is
> To suffer and be strong.'[3]

Buoyancy.—When Joseph was cast into prison he did not seek out a dark corner and weep. Sweet liberty was gone, but he did not for a moment give way to despair. We are told that his soul entered into the iron,[4] but not that the iron entered into his soul. Why should he be either lachrymose or callous? He

[1] Amiel. [2] Thomas à Kempis. [3] Whittier. [4] Ps. 107, R.V. m.

was without fear and without reproach; he had youth and heart's ease and hope to cheer him; and, like every healthy-minded person, he felt that the joys of life were far greater than its sorrows. He was no sooner in prison than he discovered how interesting a place a prison could be. He quickly adapted himself to his new surroundings, and the same qualities which won for him the stewardship in the house of the captain of the guard, raised him as high in Pharaoh's state prison. All the prisoners were committed to his charge, and the keeper trusted him absolutely (vv.[22. 23]). Joseph is the kind of youth who, as if by a law of nature, always seems to come out at the top. Submerge him, and he is soon on the crest of the wave again. His buoyancy seems almost miraculous; yet most of the qualities by which such a man rises and prospers in the world are perfectly imitable—brave-heartedness, honesty, patience, the love of hard work, the abiding sense of responsibility to God, the unshakable conviction that life means something intense and something good.

SYMPATHY.—Joseph spent some years of his life in the Egyptian king's prison. It was a good school for one who was destined to be a leader of men. He found himself among some of the highest of the king's subjects. He was rich in sympathy, and quickly forgot his own sorrows in helping others to bear theirs. He studied the faces of his fellow-prisoners; he inquired into their troubles; he listened to their tales; he became their confidant and counsellor. He learned many of the secrets of the human heart, and many of the ways of a king's court. He perceived—what his own case had already taught him—that a man might wear a felon's garb and chain without being a felon. He found that some who had worn purple and fine linen carried a heavy burden of woe. And he was able to help some of them. Besides being a dreamer, he possessed the gift of interpreting the dreams of others. He knew that the visions of the night often take shape from the hopes and fears of the daytime. He believed that promises and warnings were

given to men in their sleep. He received impressions vividly, and he had the art—some men have it in a marked degree—of reading the mind's construction in the face. He was a discerner of spirits. His old master, the captain of the guard, committed to his charge two notable prisoners, the king's chief butler and chief baker. There had been an attempt at poisoning in the palace, and the one or the other was a traitor. Joseph had little difficulty in arriving at a conclusion; he knew as by instinct which of the two was guilty and which innocent. His interpretation of their dreams did little more than put his verdict into words. He predicted that the butler would be restored to his butlership, and that the baker would be hanged.

LIBERTY.—Having interpreted the butler's dream, and foretold his restoration, Joseph thought for once of himself, and asked a favour in return. 'Have me in remembrance when it shall be well with thee, and show kindness, I pray thee, unto me, and make mention of me unto Pharaoh, and bring me out of this house: for indeed I was stolen away out of the land of the Hebrews: and here also I have done nothing that they should put me into the dungeon'[1] ($40^{14, 15}$). These words, with their pathetic human touches, bring Joseph very near us. They give us a glimpse into his mind. He is perfectly simple and natural. Prison life is irksome enough to his brave, gentle spirit. He suffers like a captive bird, and when he sees a ray of hope he eagerly turns his face to the light. But while his petition is so simple in its pathos, so wistful in its plea for a little warmth of human kindness, it is also noble in its reticence. When he pleads his innocence, he breaks into no invectives against those who have wronged him. He stretches a point to avoid the remotest allusion to his brothers, saying he was stolen—not sold—into the land of Egypt; and he says nothing of the lady of high degree in whose stead he is suffering. We see that if he is released he will not spend the rest of his life in wreaking

[1] Literally, 'the hole.'

vengeance upon his enemies. He only longs for liberty, the sweetest ingredient in the cup of earthly happiness. But his very calmness and moderation make our sympathy with him the intenser. Nothing kindles in generous hearts a warmer flame of mingled indignation and pity than the sad fate of an innocent person doomed by some miscarriage of justice to suffer long years of imprisonment as if he were guilty. If such things are hateful to man, how much more to God! 'He hath looked down from the height of His sanctuary, from heaven did the LORD behold the earth, to hear the sighing of the prisoner.'[1] It is His purpose 'to proclaim liberty to the captive, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound';[2] yet for His own high ends He has permitted some of the noblest men the world has ever seen to languish in the gloom of dungeons. But there is always this compensation, that He is with them in prison, and the sorrows of captivity make the joys of deliverance, when it at length comes, a hundred times sweeter to the soul.

MEMORY.—The chief butler could not but express his readiness to plead the cause of his innocent comrade in distress. Joseph should not lack a zealous friend at court. He might rest assured that everything would be done just as he desired. His hard case would be laid before the great king. All that judgment and tact and skill could do for him would be done. He need have no fear of forgetfulness, and little fear of any further miscarriage. The order for his release would soon be signed. Patience a little, and the prison door would be closing behind him, and his rescuer congratulating him on his happy deliverance. So the two men parted, confident of meeting again soon; and Joseph waited in hope. But the days became weeks, and the weeks stretched into months, and the months dragged on into years, 'yet did not the chief butler remember Joseph, but forgot him' (v.[23]). His forgetfulness was a sin of omission, but none the less grave on that account. Memory has a moral as well as a

[1] Ps. 102[19, 20]. [2] Isa. 61[1].

mental aspect. Many people count it merely a misfortune to have what they call a bad, a weak, a defective memory. They think 'I forgot' a good and sufficient excuse. But a short memory is often another name for a cold and unfeeling heart. We never forget those whom we really love. If a woman forgets the child she bare, there is more to blame than a weak memory, there is a loveless, unmotherly nature. And if a prosperous man forgets the favours he received and the promises he gave in his days of adversity, the right name for his forgetfulness is ingratitude.

> 'Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
> Thou dost not bite so nigh
> As benefits forgot:
> Though thou the waters warp,
> Thy sting is not so sharp
> As friend remembered not." [1]

SELF-JUDGMENT.—There is a law of association of ideas, whereby thoughts, words, and acts which occur together come to be so connected in the mind that, when one of them is afterwards suggested, a whole train of ideas is instantly set in motion. Some word or incident serves to rediscover great forgotten tracts of our past life, like a lightning flash illuminating a dark sky. A striking illustration is found in the narrative (41^8). Pharaoh has a troubled dream, about which all his courtiers soon come to hear, and among the rest his chief butler, to whose mind it recalls a dream which he dreamed, now years ago, at that terrible time, so strange to look back upon, when he was suspected of treason and cast into the king's prison, along with the poor chief baker who was the real criminal, and who also dreamed a troubled dream the very same night; and neither of them could think next morning what their dreams meant, till a young Hebrew— At this point the chief butler's conscience smites him. He remembers his forgotten promise. He sees the innocent youth still languishing in prison. A word might have set him at liberty, and it has never been spoken. With a

[1] Shakespeare.

sharp pang of regret the butler condemns himself. He feels that he is unworthy of the name of friend. He has undertaken to show a kindness, and he has forgotten. We see that a promise though forgotten is not effaced. It is doubtful if anything once imprinted on the memory is ever really obliterated. There are certainly whole trains of ideas lying silent, inactive, as it were dead, in dim subconscious regions of the mind, yet ready to spring to life again whenever the magnetic word shall be spoken. And our own long-forgotten thoughts may be our judges.

MANHOOD.—The chief butler tells Pharaoh what he knows about 'a young man, a Hebrew, servant to the captain of the guard' (41[12]). The story at once arouses the interest of the troubled king, whose savants—or sacred scribes (R.V. m.)—have failed to give him any guidance in his perplexity; and Joseph is suddenly ordered to appear before the greatest of earthly monarchs. He comes without delay, and is conscious of being tested, but he bears himself during the ordeal with quiet dignity and self-possession. He is neither elated nor alarmed. He comes as the bringer of 'an answer of peace' (v.[16]), and he is worthy of the part which he plays, for there is peace in his own soul. The first sentence he speaks in the king's presence contains the name of God (v.[16]); over and over again he uses the sacred name (vv.[25. 28. 32]); and we do not need to guess the secret of his strength and repose. He has never been more vividly conscious of God than he is in this hour when he stands for the first time in a king's court, and the mind's vision of God dims the lustre of all created glory, so that no magnificence dazzles him, no power overawes him. He speaks in the firm accents which proceed from a lofty intellect and a pure heart. What he has all his life been growing to, he now is. He has let himself be as clay in the great Potter's hands, and has been so moulded that there is not a weak line left in his character. We see in him the result of the steady and commanding influence of the personality of God in human life. He has reached the age of thirty with a clean

record; and every temptation resisted, every ideal cherished, every victory won, has contributed something to his definite and marked individuality; so that he now stands before the king, and before us, a pattern of pure and beautiful manhood.

INTERPRETATION.—If two men who speak different languages wish to converse with one another, they require to use an interpreter, who knows the languages of both. Is it possible that there may be interpreters, not only between man and man, but between God and man? Are there men who learn something of the mysterious symbolic language in which God speaks, and translate it to their fellow-men? It can scarcely be doubted that, in a wide sense of the term, there have been such interpreters in all ages. Joseph interprets the divine mind as mysteriously expressed to Pharaoh in dreams. At the present day anyone can accurately foretell what next year's harvest in Egypt will be like, but only by a miracle could one look fourteen years ahead. 'When, instead of the health-giving northern breezes, the deadly south-east wind blows day after day, it means that there is a rainless season in the south, and that next year's Nile will be low. Between the blasting east wind of Genesis and the low Niles, which brought famine with them, there was a close connection.'[1] Joseph predicts to Pharaoh what 'God is about to do' (vv.[25. 28]). 'The thing is established, and God will shortly bring it to pass' (v.[32]). To this interpreter every common phenomenon is also a divine act. It is God that sends rain from heaven and fruitful seasons. It is God that withholds the rain and visits the people of the earth with famine. Faith puts the emphasis upon the divine activity, science upon the natural agency. Both must be true. There were natural causes, unknown to Joseph, well known to us, for the years of plenty and the years of famine which he foretold to Pharaoh—the action of rain and snow, the rise and fall of mighty lakes, away in the heart of Africa. But he is right in tracing events to their supernatural cause. Nature

[1] Sayce.

is not a godless mechanism. Her processes are controlled by reason. Her laws are but God's ways of working.

INSPIRATION.—Joseph's words and mien fill the Egyptian king with wonder. Pharaoh has never in all his life seen a man 'so discreet and wise,' not even among his oldest and most experienced counsellors. He has plenty of men around him who are learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, but this young Hebrew has something which lifts him above the wisest of them. To his servants Pharaoh speaks of him as 'a man in whom the Spirit of God is' (v.[38]); and to Joseph himself he says, 'God hath showed thee all this' (v.[39]). Joseph assents: he *is* a man in whom the Spirit of God is; God *has* showed him all this. It is scarcely to be supposed that the Hebrews, still less that the Egyptians, already thought of the Spirit of God as a distinct Person. The Spirit or Breath of God is the divine energy working in the souls of men, illuminating, quickening, inspiring them, revealing to them the mind and will of God for the practical ordering of human life on earth. It will be seen that Joseph has all the unmistakable marks of inspiration. His childlike manner, his disparagement of his own talent, his almost absurd humility, combined with the splendid audacity which leaves no shadow of doubt or fear or modest hesitation about the message which he delivers, give him a kinship with all the great speakers for God. The pride of intellect and the energy of the Spirit are diametrically opposed. 'God lifts even the simple mind to understand more of the eternal truth than if a man had studied in the schools ten years.'[1] Ruskin has said: 'I believe the first test of a truly great man is his humility. I do not mean by humility doubt of his own power, or hesitation of speaking his opinions. . . . All great men not only know their business, but usually know that they know it; and are not only right in their main opinions, but they usually know that they are right in them, only they do not think much of themselves on that account. . . .

[1] Thomas à Kempis.

They have a curious under-sense of powerlessness, feeling that the greatness is not *in* them, but *through* them, and that they could not do or be anything else than God made them.' 'Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy name give glory.'[1] 'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.'[2]

XIII.

HONOUR.

GEN. XLI. 40-57.

> 'Heaven doth with us as we with torches do,
> Not light them for themselves.'—SHAKESPEARE.

MERIT.—The men of history whose lives excite our deepest interest are those who have come through the fire of trial and triumphed through conflict. Joseph as a boy dreamed that he was destined to rule, but he came into his kingdom in ways which were not in his dreams. Milton praises the man

> 'whose worthy deeds
> Raise him to be the second in that realm
> Of Pharaoh.'

What were his merits? He was brave and patient in his thirteen years of rough apprenticeship; he did his duty as in the sight of God; and while he became deeply experienced in the ways of the world, he kept himself unspotted from its evil. He merited honour, and his reward came at length. He rose from a prison-cell to the seat next the throne. There is the very spirit of romance in the idea of the transformation of the dreamy Hebrew boy into the keen, bold Egyptian governor—the greatest statesman of his time. So others have risen: David rose from the sheep-cote to be the greatest king of his time, Elisha from the plough to be the greatest prophet of his time, Peter from the fishing-

[1] Ps. 115[1]. [2] Zech. 4[6].

boat to be the greatest apostle of his time, Luther from the miner's hut to be the greatest reformer of his time, Bunyan from the tinker's kitchen to be the greatest seer of his time, Livingstone from the weaver's loom to be the greatest missionary of his time, Lincoln from the tanner's yard to be the greatest statesman of his time. 'The age of romance has not ceased; it never ceases; it does not, if we think of it, so much as very sensibly decline.'[1] But the noblest of those whose names have been inscribed on the temple of fame have not sought for fame; they have simply done the will of God and loved their fellow-men, and honour has been thrust upon them. Joseph, whose public life began at thirty, might have stood for his portrait to one who depicted an ideal statesman:

'Dost thou look back on what hath been
As some divinely gifted man,
Whose life in low estate began
And on a simple village green;

Who makes by force his merit known,
And lives to snatch the golden keys,
And mould a mighty state's decrees,
And shape the whisper of a throne;

And moving up from higher to higher,
Becomes on fortune's crowning slope
The pillar of a people's hope,
The centre of a world's desire.'[2]

MINISTRY.—Joseph is called to office as Pharaoh's Prime Minister. The task is tremendous, the weight of responsibility great, and Joseph is only a young man. But beyond the will of man he discerns the will of God, who is sending him to preserve life (45^6), and making him lord of all Egypt (v.^{9}). Thrilled by the sense of a divine vocation, he can neither shrink back in alarm nor contemplate for a moment the possibility of failure. He who summons him to do His work will sustain him by His all-sufficient grace. It is the consciousness of a high and holy calling, issuing in a constant sense of responsibility to God, that

[1] Carlyle. [2] Tennyson.

produces the noblest servants of any commonwealth. The statesman who owns his obligation to Heaven is not likely either to abuse his power or to let his head be turned by the splendour of his position. Some importance is attached in the narrative to the fact that Pharaoh took off his signet ring from his hand and put it upon Joseph's, arrayed him in vesture of fine linen, put a gold chain about his neck, and made him ride in the second royal chariot ($41^{42. 43}$). The value of insignia lies in what they signify. The minister's seal and vesture, like the prophet's mantle, the judge's ermine, the councillor's chain, cannot dignify mean men, and mean men bring all insignia into contempt. Yet 'is not a symbol ever, to him who has eyes for it, some dimmer or clearer revelation of the Godlike?'[1] If the insignia of an office are the tokens of a people's admiration and love, they have their place and worth. 'The ring and robe of Joseph,' says George Eliot, 'were no objects for a good man's ambition, but they were the signs of that credit he won by his divinely inspired skill, and which enabled him to act as a saviour to his brethren.'

WORK.—As Pharaoh's Prime Minister Joseph was exalted to princely rank, had a majestic title—Zaphnathpaaneah—conferred upon him, and wherever he went received the plaudits of the multitude (vv.$^{43. 45}$). In his new position he met with new temptations, and overcame them. He gave himself, body and soul, not to the pomps and shows, but to the duties and drudgeries, of office. The ceremonials of the court and the genuflections of the people were scarcely relevant to his divine mission. 'Joseph went out from the presence of Pharaoh, and went throughout all the land of Egypt' (v.^{46}). He had cities to visit, plans to mature, proclamations to issue, agents to choose, wise men to encourage, fools to restrain. While the earth was bringing forth corn in handfuls, he saw in imagination a starving population and heard the bitter cry for bread. He was at once a visionary and a shrewd man of business. We see in him what has been well

[1] Carlyle.

called 'the most formidable combination of human qualities known in history—the combination of the religious mystic and the man of action.'[1] Faith in God and sympathy with suffering men made him an earnest, incessant worker. He did not subscribe to the opinion that idleness is the stamp of nobility. Though next the king in rank, he was the busiest person in the land. To the man of happy temperament, labour is enjoyment, a sort of repose, a necessary condition; while inaction is an effort, a weariness, an impossible state. In his youth Joseph saw himself the centre of a circle of envious brethren, whom he expected to bow down and serve him; in his manhood he finds himself the centre of a far wider circle of needy fellow-men, whom he toils with all his might to serve and to save. One naturally asks the question, Was he, or was he not, ambitious? What has been said of another Prime Minister will apply to him. 'If ambition means love of power or fame for the sake of glitter, decoration, or external renown, or even dominion and authority on their own account, I think he had none of it. Ambition in a higher sense, the motion of a resolute and potent genius to use strength for the purpose of strength, to clear the path, dash obstacles aside, force good causes forward—such a quality as that is the very law of the being of a personality so vigorous, intrepid, confident, and capable as his.'[2]

LOVE.—Soon after Joseph was raised to power he married Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah, priest of On. Her city, called by the Greeks the City of the Sun (Heliopolis), was the seat of the head of the official priests, who would hold much the same position in Egypt as the Archbishop of Canterbury in England, except that his office was hereditary. 'The priestly head of the State,' says Professor Sayce, 'stood next in rank to Pharaoh; and in marrying his daughter, therefore, Joseph was taken into the very heart of the royal circle.' 'The priests belonged to the great landed proprietors; they formed the highest

[1] Lord Rosebery. [2] Morley's *Gladstone*.

aristocracy; they attended and controlled the kings; they were proverbial for their scrupulousness in guarding the purity of their families.'[1] The religion of the Egyptians was certainly higher and purer than that of the native tribes of Canaan, with whom the Hebrews were forbidden to intermarry. We gather that Joseph's love did not lower him morally or spiritually. It did not incline him to become an Egyptian in belief or worship. He remained to the end true to the God of his fathers. He had that best preparation for an indissoluble covenant of love—a faith which refines and hallows the affections, a sense of the presence of God which ennobles all the relationships of life. He had a clean hand and a pure heart to give his bride. An Egyptian woman had once offered him an illegitimate love, which he rejected with loathing and horror. Had he sinned in the house of Potiphar he would never have rejoiced in the house of Potipherah. 'Canst thou reckon among the blessings which Heaven has bestowed on thee the love of faithful women? Purify thy heart, and make it worthy of theirs. All the prizes of life are nothing compared with that one.'[2]

FORGETTING.—Joseph calls his firstborn son 'Manasseh.' 'God,' he says, 'hath made me forget all my toil and all my father's house' (v.[51]). The little child is received as God's gift, the token of His love. 'God thought of you, and so I am here,'[3] is what every babe says to understanding hearts. The name Manasseh is full of pathos, and tells its own tale. Joseph has been for many years homeless and friendless. Sensitive and emotional, as ready for smiles as for tears, dowered with an immense capacity for enjoyment, he has hid within his breast a wealth of affection unspent, of feeling repressed. His exile and bondage have not been easy to bear, and in Egypt he has been terribly alone, especially in crowds. Past him has streamed day by day a procession of human beings to whom he has been no more than the mire of the street. Can he ever forget that hard

[1] Kalisch. [2] Thackeray. [3] George Macdonald.

experience? God at length gives him a home and a helpmeet, happiness and hope; and at once all the unkindness of his father's house, the anguish of exile, the bitterness of long years of servile toil, begin to fade from his memory like an unpleasant dream. Love charms away his sorrow. Asenath and Manasseh teach him the secret of 'a sweet forgetting.' It will soon appear, of course, that he has not in any literal and absolute sense forgotten his home and his kindred. Does an exile ever really forget? 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.' Yet it may well be that 'a little warmth, a little light, of love's bestowing' has more virtue than all the waters of Lethe to efface from the soul the traces of trial and grief. 'Manasseh' meant toil and loneliness and weariness forgotten. There is a house in London called *Vergiss-Heimweh*,[1] where some Teuton has evidently found a happiness that has softened the poignancy of his regret for the old home in the Fatherland. It may be a little child's doing. Man as well as woman has a forgetting, though his is not so direct or profound as hers. 'A woman hath sorrow, but . . . she remembereth no more the anguish, for joy that a man is born into the world.'[2]

XIV.

CONSCIENCE.

GEN. XLII.

> 'Our acts our angels are, or good or ill,
> Our fatal shadows that walk by us still.'—EMERSON.

RETRIBUTION.—There is a Nemesis, a divine Justice, which pursues, and sooner or later overtakes, all evil-doers; for while God is merciful, He is also righteous, and will by no means spare the guilty. The connection between sin and punishment is not always apparent, and men cheat themselves with the delusive

[1] Forget home-sickness. [2] John 16[21].

hope of escaping detection. 'Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.'[1] But 'be sure your sin will find you out.'[2] Joseph's brethren committed a crime in the fields of Dothan. Twenty years passed, and they tried to forget, and perhaps succeeded. But oblivion is not atonement. Time works many wonders, but neither time nor eternity makes a crime less heinous than it was at the moment of its commission. Troubles at length began to come to Joseph's brethren, each giving a painful tap to their memory. They suffered the pangs of hunger; they had to go abroad to seek bread; they found themselves thrown into an Egyptian prison. They had time to reflect, conscience began to do its work, and they said one to another, 'We are verily guilty concerning our brother' (v.[21]). As their troubles thickened 'their heart failed them,' and with trembling lips they said, 'What is this that God hath done unto us?' (v.[28]). They knew that they were at last coming face to face with their Judge, and that He would not spare them. The relation between sin and suffering, which is as certain as the laws of nature, can only be broken by God, and He does not break it until sinners have sincerely repented. Conscience, experience, and revelation join in saying, 'Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.'[3] Wrong-doers congratulate themselves that they have not been observed, or that their sin has been forgotten, and that they are safe, until suddenly a train of circumstances, laid by the hand of God, reveals to their startled consciences the fact that nothing has been unobserved, nothing forgotten. 'Judgment for an evil thing is many times delayed some day or two, some century or two, but it is sure as life, it is sure as death! In the centre of the world-whirlwind verily now as in the oldest days dwells and speaks a God. The great heart of the world is Just.'[4]

TESTING.—When Joseph overheard his brothers saying, 'We

[1] Eccles. 8[11]. [2] Num. 32[23]. [3] Gal. 6[7]. [4] Carlyle.

are verily guilty' (v.21), he did not at once reveal himself to them and offer them forgiveness. Some readers blame him on this account. A foreign writer says, 'He is hard-hearted enough systematically and in cold blood to punish them for the suffering they inflicted on him,' and 'to put them to the torture,'[1] when he should have instantly fallen upon their necks and kissed them. If Joseph had been a weaker man he would have done as is here suggested. If his amiability had been untempered by principle, he would have done it. But Joseph's conscience was as sound as his heart was tender. He had serious work to do before he indulged in emotion. He avoided the sentiment which blurs the distinctions between good and evil. Forgiveness was not his only duty to his brothers. He had to test the reality of their repentance, to drive the arrow of conviction deeper into their hearts, keeping his own lips sealed till the right moment came for divulging to them his secret. He could endure the pain of seeing them suffer, in the hope that suffering would bring them to a better mind. Providence was making him their judge, as nature had made him their brother, and he loved them with that exacting love which has often been an erring brother's salvation. He would rejoice to have them reconciled to himself, but still more to see them reconciled to God. Love does not always caress and soothe and say kind things. Sometimes it scourges. Its mingled goodness and severity are the reflection of the perfect love of God, who leads His children along rough ways to repentance, that He may at last have the joy of giving them the kiss of forgiveness.

FAITH.—Joseph is careful not to treat his brothers with any needless severity. His first impulse was to keep nine of them in prison, and to send one back to bring his youngest brother down to him. But after confining them all for three days, he decides to send nine home and to keep only one as a hostage. He gives them his reason in the words, 'I fear

[1] Oort.

God' (v.^{18}). This is admirably characteristic of him. The fear of God is his religion. He has the name of God continually on his lips. He thinks and speaks of God as naturally as he breathes. He always expresses his faith in God in the simplest and fewest words, and it is worth while to bring all these brief pointed utterances together, that we may feel their cumulative effect. 'How can I sin against God?' (39^{4}). 'Do not interpretations belong to God?' (40^{8}). 'God will give Pharaoh an answer' (41^{16}). 'What God is about to do He hath showed unto Pharaoh' (vv.$^{25.\ 28}$). 'God hath made me to forget all my toil' (v.^{51}). 'God hath made me fruitful' (v.^{52}). 'God be gracious unto thee, my son' (43^{29}). 'God hath sent me before you to preserve life' (45^{5}). 'God hath sent me to preserve a remnant in the earth' (v.^{7}). 'It was not you that sent me hither, but God' (v.^{8}). 'God hath made me lord of all Egypt' (v.^{9}). 'These are my sons, whom God hath given me' (48^{9}). 'Fear not: for am I in the place of God?' (50^{19}). 'Ye meant evil against me, but God meant it for good' (v.^{20}). 'I die, but God will surely visit you' (v.^{24}). The faith of this man—an ideal to all the Hebrews who came after him—is simple, strong, unwavering. These short sentences reveal his whole inner life. The thought of God is as familiar to him as the face of a friend, and gives the note of sublimity to everything he says. The current of his spiritual life is still and equable. We do not read of any wrestling and struggling, nor even of any vowing and covenanting, in his life. When he was yet a child, his heart was somehow drawn to God; when he left home, a lad of seventeen, 'the LORD was with him'; when he stood before Pharaoh at thirty, the Spirit of God was in him; and his habitual realisation of the presence of God was the motive-power of all his actions. It is evident that his religion was an inward principle, not a code of laws, a set of propositions, or an array of ceremonies. His creed—his central enthusiasm for God, the thing which he really believed—determined his life. It is remarkable that so early a book as Genesis should

present us with an ideal of true religion as something entirely separate from outward forms, as simply and purely the life of the human spirit in contact with, and under the influence of the Divine Spirit. One often hears it said that it does not matter what a man believes, provided his life be right; as if a stream might somehow be pure though the fountain is polluted, or as if we might expect a fine crop of grapes from a thorn-tree. The story of Joseph teaches us rather that nothing is so practical as faith; and all the wisest men bid us covet 'such a sense of God as shall be the habitually ready principle of reverence, love, gratitude, resignation, obedience.'[1]

CONSCIENCE.—In the same chapter in which we read of Joseph's fear of God, we read also of his brothers' fear. 'Their heart failed them, and they turned trembling one to another, saying, What is this that God hath done unto us?' (42^{28}). 'They were afraid' (v.[35]). Joseph's fear of the LORD, the holy reverence which is the beginning of wisdom, is a noble, beautiful, honourable sentiment, issuing in a good conscience and a tranquil mind. His brothers' fear of God is an anxious, restless, troubled feeling, issuing in the pain of remorse and the dread of punishment. Their trials turn their eyes into their very souls. Memory does its stern work in them. Their past life rises before them with awful clearness. They confess that they are verily guilty (literally 'guilty, guilty') concerning their brother. Joseph profoundly pities them as they stand before him with the abject mien of culprits. It is their religion—true religion as far as it goes—that terrifies them; their belief in God that alarms and torments them. Their imagination conjures up spectral forms and voices out of the past. They have sinned against a child (v.[22]), and the pitiful distress which they would not regard, the pleading voice which they would not hear, the fields of Dothan, the pit, the Ishmaelites, the ill-gotten gain, the coat dipped in blood, the shameless lying—all the details of their crime now come back

[1] Butler.

to torture them, and even the shuddering suggestion that their brother's 'blood is required' (v.^{22})—though they had once made sure of escaping at least *that* charge ($37^{22, 26}$)—awakens no protest in their minds. They bow their heads in guilt and shame; they stand condemned at the bar of their own conscience; and they expect the righteous judgment of God. It is an awful moment for any man when he finds that the past is not past. 'If it were done when 'tis done!' But it is never done till justice is done. That is why 'it is hell on earth already begun when a sinner begins to remember.'[1]

Nemesis.—Joseph takes Simeon from among his brethren, binds him before their eyes, and retains him as a prisoner and hostage, while he allows the others to go home (v.^{24}). Simeon is the villain of the piece, the evil genius of the family, the arch-plotter of mischief, to whom a period of detention will do no harm. At the same time, his imprisonment keeps the others from being elated at their own release. They see that the governor means to retain his power over them, to make them feel his hand laid upon them when they are far away, compelling them to return. There is that in their conscience which prevents them from uttering a word of complaint. When they reach home, and find that their money has been sent back in their sacks—which they would at one time have counted a piece of uncommon good fortune—their alarm is intensified. What is this that God has done to them? (v.^{28}). They have a vague restless sense of insecurity, as if they were walking among snares and pitfalls. Guilty men fear where no fear is. They tremble at the rustling of a leaf. 'Suspicion always haunts the guilty mind.'[2] Whereas the man who has a good conscience is at peace in a sea of trouble.

> 'Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night,
> Nor for the arrow that flieth by day . . .
> There shall no evil befall thee,
> Neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling.'[3]

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[1] Dr. Whyte. [2] Shakespeare. [2] Ps. $91^{5, 10}$.

PROVIDENCE.—When Jacob's sons returned to Canaan, and told him what had befallen them in Egypt, they seemed to infect him with their own fear. He refused to see anything but the dark side of things. There is a plaintive cadence in his words:

> 'Me ye have bereaved of my children;
> Joseph is not, and Simeon is not;
> And ye will take Benjamin away:
> All these things are against me' (v.[36]).

And he adds forebodings of mischief, grey hairs, sorrow, and Sheol (v.[38]). Melancholy Jacob's faith is not yet perfected. Nursing his sorrow, saturating his mind with self-pity, he finds a dreary pleasure in counting his troubles, and inferring that they are all (the grand total is three!) against him; while we, who know how the drama is unfolding, perceive that all the things in question, and many more, are working together for his good, and that he will live to confess that God has redeemed him out of all evil. God conceals 'His bright designs' in order that His servants may learn to trust Him in the dark as well as in the light. It has been finely said that 'the secrets God keeps must be as good as those He tells.'[1] And as our knowledge of Him increases, we find

> 'That more and more a providence
> Of love is understood,
> Making the springs of time and sense
> Sweet with eternal good.'[2]

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[1] George Macdonald. [2] Whittier.

XV.

BROTHERHOOD.

GEN. XXXVIII., XLIII.-XLIV.

''Tis but a brother's speech we need,
Speech where an accent's change gives each
The other's soul.'—BROWNING.

PRAISE.—Judah, the fourth son of Jacob and Leah, is the hero of this chapter. When his mother gave him his name she said, 'This time will I praise the LORD' (29^{35}). It was long before a new significance was read into the name: 'Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren praise' (49^{8}). In his youth Judah gave no sign of living up to his great name. His mother could not praise God, nor his brethren himself, for the kind of life he lived. His boon companion was an Adullamite ($38^{1. 12. 20}$), and his wife a Canaanite (v.^{2}); and in his riper manhood his association with the heathen inhabitants of the land, and his conformity to their customs, led him into very miry ways. He was one of those who conspired against Joseph, and it was at his suggestion that the dreamer was taken out of the pit and sold ($37^{26. 27}$). But a few more years wrought a singular change in his character. Somehow his strong and passionate nature was purged and ennobled. From the fourth place in the brotherhood he rose by force of character to the first. He merited the pre-eminence, his elder brothers being intellectually and morally smaller men. He became the recognised leader and spokesman of the family, who commanded his father's confidence, and whose word carried conviction. Clear-headed, great-hearted, strong-willed, he was the man for an emergency. No one could reason so forcibly or plead so pathetically as he, and his eloquence was only the sincere and artless expression of the great thoughts of a noble and simple nature.

PURITY—Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law, is one of those strange, pathetic figures which serve to show us what ancient heathenism in Canaan must have been. According to the standards of her time and country, she passed for a 'holy' woman. She was mistaken for a priestess of one of the sanctuaries of the land. But what was holiness at these heathen temples? What was the sacrifice which a priestess offered at the shrine of her god? It was the sacrifice of her virtue to the worshippers at the temple. The holy places of ancient Canaan, like the shrines of modern India, were cess-pools of iniquity, in which consecration meant prostitution. This fact indicates, more clearly than anything else can, what was the tremendous task which the Hebrews had to accomplish as the chosen people of God. To identify religion with a pure ideal, to make moral discipline the leading object of worship, to demand a righteous life as the essential condition of the divine favour, to purge the sanctuary, the home, the nation, to make Canaan really a Holy Land—nothing less than this was their mission. Even if they only partially succeeded, it was a splendid achievement, to which we owe that moral idealism which can never cease to be the salt of the earth.

RESIGNATION.—Remembering the sad fate which was supposed to have overtaken Joseph, Jacob at first refused outright to let his youngest son, Rachel's only other child, go down to Egypt (42^{38}). Reuben tried to change his mind; but Reuben's character had little weight, and his offer to let his own sons be slain if he failed to bring Benjamin back was too preposterous to have any good effect. But when Judah undertook to become surety for the beloved son, promising to bear the blame for ever if he did not restore him to his father, Jacob at length summoned up courage to face the facts and bow to God's will. He commended his sons to the care of Almighty God (El Shaddai); and the upward glance gave himself strength. The things which he so much dreaded appeared less formidable the

moment he looked above them to God; and there is a certain noble pathos in the calm words in which he expresses his acquiescence in the Divine will: 'And if I am bereaved of my children, I am bereaved' (43^{14}). Such words, it is true, are sometimes uttered with only a Stoical calm.

> 'We waive our claim to bliss, and try to bear;
> With close-lipped patience for our only friend,
> Sad patience, too near neighbour to despair.'[1]

But a believer in a God of love can face the inevitable sorrows of life with a different kind of resignation. He can surrender his fondest hopes and dearest desires with unmurmuring patience, because he believes that the Lord and Giver of life does all things well. He can be calm and tranquil, if he cannot yet be happy and joyous, in a life bereft of love, because he feels that he is accepting, not the decrees of an inexorable fate, but the appointments of an unerring love. Every man is sooner or later familiar with death; every man has to utter his Amen, his So be it, somehow; and there is no better way than this: 'The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away: blessed be the name of the Lord.'[2]

CONSCIENCE.—The story of the second visit of Jacob's sons to Egypt is a rapid, picturesque narrative, alive with human interest, abounding in dramatic situations, and leading up to a thrilling *dénouement*. All the movement and incident are made subordinate to the unfolding of character. There is intense excitement in the minds of the eleven brothers who come down from Canaan, and an expectation scarcely less intense in the mind of the one who awaits their arrival in Egypt. Things doubtful and mysterious will soon become clear. What manner of men will Joseph find his brethren to be? How will they stand the test to which he has subjected them? He earnestly hopes and longs for the best. Fear is the predominant feeling in the hearts of his brothers, and a command which they receive to dine with the

[1] Matthew Arnold. [2] Job 1^{21}.

governor only increases their alarm. What does it mean? Are they going to be taken as thieves, as they were before taken as spies? (43^{18}). Joseph's steward—a man who echoes his master's devout speech—endeavours to calm their fears, bringing forth their captive brother, and conducting them into his lord's house with every mark of courtesy and respect. But in the guest-chamber another very strange thing happens. Their host arranges them at table in the exact order of their ages. Does the man know their private history? And if he does, what other dread secrets may not soon be torn from their breasts in this Egyptian hall of mystery? Though they try to enjoy the feast that has been spread for them, and even to be merry with their host ($v.^{34}$), their central fear remains. Their conscience has been aroused and cannot be appeased. Their superficial mirth does not still their raging inward unrest. With bated breath they await the something which they know is coming. The suspense is almost too much to bear.

SYMPATHY.—Joseph's personality stands out very distinctly in this part of the narrative. He is a man of action, whose hands and hours are full. It is no light task for him to be Pharaoh's grand vizier. He does not leave the practical part of his work to subordinates. He is at his government house, apparently as usual, early on the day on which his brothers chance to arrive ($v.^{16}$). He has to attend to an immense variety of interests, governing a country without oppressing it, feeding a people without pauperising them. Every faculty of his mind is awake. He makes haste, and expects others to do the same (43^{30} $45^{9.\ 13}$). We see his alertness, lightness, swiftness, freedom, and resource. We think of him as grave and calm and strong, accustomed to issue orders and to receive instant obedience. Yet we see, too, that the man is not sunk in the official. If he does not wear his heart on his sleeve, it beats steadily enough in the right place. If there is a man of feeling in the world, it is the Egyptian governor. When he catches sight of his brothers

on their second arrival, his heart leaps up and his eyes devour them. Is there among them the face he longs to see—of one younger and fairer than all the others? Yes, that is he—his own brother Benjamin. When he saw him last, he was a little child of seven, playing in the green fields of Beersheba, at their father's tent door; now he has grown to stalwart manhood. At first Joseph scarcely dares to look at him. He wishes to be master of himself. Giving some hasty orders about the reception of the Hebrews, he plunges again into work, and remains immersed in business until noon, when he comes home and endeavours to talk calmly and rationally. With a great man's air of condescension he asks his guests if this is the brother of whom they spoke on their former visit. But when he turns his eyes full on 'his brother, his mother's son,' and tries to give him a grave paternal blessing, it is too much for him; he has to seek 'a place to weep in,' and hurries into his chamber to weep there (v.[30]). He is like one who said:

> 'The pretty and sweet manner of it forced
> The water from me, which I should have stopped,
> But I had not so much of man in me,
> And all my mother came into mine eyes,
> And gave me up to tears.'[1]

Strong men are more than half ashamed of giving way to emotion. They wish they had their feelings under completer control. But in truth their great-heartedness, their magnetic quality of brotherly sympathy, is the secret and measure of their power. The heart nourishes, as nothing else can, the hidden roots of both the mental and the moral life, and in a great administrator the gift of sympathy acts like a charm, transmuting in his hands the iron rod of justice into the golden sceptre of love.

FIDELITY.—Joseph resolves to subject his brethren to a final and decisive test. They have brought their brother Benjamin down with them to Egypt. What are their real feelings toward

[1] Shakespeare.

this brother? Envy and malice, or loyalty and love? Will they be true or false to him in an hour of danger? If his life or his liberty is threatened, are they capable of leaving him in the lurch? If they are put to it, will they think first, or think last, of their own safety? To settle the matter, Joseph orders a cup to be put in Benjamin's sack of corn, and when they have all started for home—happy that Simeon and Benjamin are safe, astonished that all has ended so well—his steward comes riding into their midst, hurls at them a charge of stealing the governor's cup, and presently has Benjamin arrested as a thief, while the others are told that they may go. The men are appalled, but they do not show a moment's hesitation. Their brother is accused of a crime, and whether he be guilty or innocent they will never forsake him. There is only one thing to do, and they do it at once. With rent clothes they hurry back 'to the city,' and prostrate themselves before the man who has their brother's fate in his hands. Joseph has his answer before they speak a word. The men have come through the ordeal well. The anguish of their faces speaks of a great and genuine love in their hearts.

INTERCESSION.—Judah is spokesman for his brethren in this critical hour. We see him rise with them from the ground, and stand forth before the governor, his garments rent, his face pale, but with a singular nobility in his mien. His nature is stirred to the depths, and all the tenderness of his strong manhood leaps into the light of his eyes and the cadence of his voice. For simple and natural eloquence his speech—extending to seventeen verses—is almost matchless in literature. Luther says he would give anything if he could pray to God as Judah prayed to Joseph. True prayer is the spontaneous utterance of a deeply moved heart. Judah has a theme which makes him a perfect intercessor; he is pleading for a brother whom he loves, and for whose safety he has pledged his own honour. If our English literature contains anything that is worthy of being placed side by side with this Hebrew masterpiece, it is Jeanie Deans' intercession for the life

of her sister Effie at the court of Queen Anne. Speech and writing of this kind always give one the impression of a certain unique artless power. We feel, but cannot analyse the charm. The same is true of the Bible as a whole, of which Heine has said: 'There is not a vestige of art in it. It is impossible to criticise its style.' Inspiration, the breath of God touching men's spirits to finest issues, is higher than all art.

ELOQUENCE.—At the outset Judah feels his impotence to utter a word. 'What shall we say to my lord? What shall we speak?' (v.[16]). Many a great speech has begun just in that way. The cause to be pleaded is momentous, the speaker is helpless to begin. There are certain important things to say—O for an angel's tongue to say them! But lips of common clay have often worked wonders when they have been inspired by a glowing heart of love. The more fervent a man's affection, the less does he feel fit to express it—until he begins, and then comes self-forgetfulness; and that very sense of incapacity for speech gives every word that is spoken a tenfold power. Pleading on behalf of his dead friend, Mark Antony said:

> 'I am no orator . . .
> But as you know me all, a plain blunt man,
> That love my friend . . .
> For I have neither wit, nor words, nor worth,
> Action, nor utterance, nor the power of speech,
> To stir men's blood: I only speak right on.'

That is the kind of speaker who *does* stir men's blood. Hebrew or Roman, Celt or Saxon, he plays like a musician upon human heart-strings and makes them vibrate till they almost snap.

SELF-SACRIFICE.—Judah is constrained to begin with confession. The bitter truth is wrung from him that sin lies upon his own conscience and the consciences of those who are with him. Whether Benjamin is innocent or guilty, his brothers at least are guilty. God has found out their iniquity (v.[16]); justice is over-

taking them; and their hearts tell them that they ought to suffer. 'Behold, we are my lord's bondmen' (v.[16]). But Joseph interposes. He has no accusation to make against Benjamin's brothers; he simply wants to do justice; he will make a bond-servant of the man whose guilt is evident, while the others are free to go their way. Then Judah, begging leave to 'speak a word,' pleads for all he is worth. The elements of his speech are simple. As we listen to it there rises before us the pathetic figure of an aged father mourning the absence of his youngest son and longing for his speedy return; we catch a glimpse of a dear departed mother; we think of a darling son who left home and never came back—believed to have been torn in pieces; we are afraid to imagine what the father's anguish will be if he is bereft of his other son; and then we are thrilled as we hear the speaker himself passionately pleading that he may be accepted as a slave in his brother's stead, because he cannot bear to go home and witness his father's intolerable sorrow. As we read, we feel that Judah's offer to renounce the things which are dearest to the human heart—home and country and liberty—raises him to a place among the heroes of the Bible. His moral strength is matched by his tenderness. He is glorified by the spirit of self-sacrificing love. 'Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise' (49[8]). He is worthy to be the founder of the tribe which is always figured in history as a lion, and to have as the greatest of his posterity One who is at once the Lion of the tribe of Judah and the Lamb of God.

FATHERHOOD.—To such a son as Judah the word 'father' is one of the most sacred words in human speech. He uses it fourteen times in his intercession for his brother, and it is his final, climacteric word which gathers into itself all the pathos of his noble appeal. The real meaning of common words depends to a great extent upon our own sensibility, and to Judah the word father has not always had such a rich and tender content as it has now, because he has not always regarded his father with the same reverence and love. He deceived his father. He conspired

to commit a crime which lacerated his father's heart. But as he grew older, he became more filial. His eyes were opened. He realised his indebtedness to his father, witnessed his father's lonely sorrow, and understood the real nobility of his father's character. And now he responds to a true fatherhood with a true sonship, and proves it by his willingness to endure the last extremity of hardship rather than let his father be stricken with another sorrow.

TEARS.—Judah did not know what chords he was touching in the heart of the man with whom he was pleading. He thought he was appealing to the clemency of a judge, but he was moving and melting the heart of a brother and a son. Such words would have drawn tears even from the eyes of a complete stranger, however unused to weep, and to Joseph their pathos is overwhelming. He could not have 'refrained himself' any longer even if it had been necessary, and, happily, the need is now past. His doubts and fears are dispelled. He is convinced that his brothers are changed men. Gentler, kinder, truer, they have proved themselves loyal to their brother in his hour of trial and danger, and one of them had shown himself a pattern of heroic manhood. Joseph feels it is time to unmask. Hastily ordering his retinue to withdraw, since it is not fitting that the eyes of strangers should witness a scene so intimate and so sacred, he lets the flood-gates of emotion burst open, weeps aloud, and says to his brothers—speaking now in their own language—'I am Joseph.' At his words their hearts leap and pause; their faces are a picture of terror and dismay; a stupor of amazement holds them dumb. When he begins to speak to them, they cannot answer him (45[3]). Shall all guilty men one day be thus appalled before the innocent whom they have persecuted? 'They shall look on him whom they have pierced, and mourn.'[1]

PROVIDENCE.—But Joseph has no thought of humiliating his brothers. He thinks only of making them better and happier

[1] Zech. 12.[10].

men. He hastens to speak gracious words to them, lifting up their thoughts to God, on whom his own mind is habitually fixed. They have acknowledged their sin, and are grieved and angry with themselves (v.[5]). Remorse has done its work. Let them now look away from themselves and their sin to the God who is behind all events, who guides and controls all human affairs, who has been overruling all his and their actions for their common good. We mark his characteristic reiteration of the divine name. 'God did send me before you to preserve life. . . . God sent me before you to preserve you a remnant in the earth, and to save you alive by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God' (vv[5. 7. 8]). His purpose is not to deny or diminish the guilt of their actions, which must be judged by motives rather than results, but to show them—and they will be lost in wonder to see—that God in the end brings good out of evil, and that even while they have been thinking thoughts of hatred regarding another, God has been thinking thoughts of love regarding themselves. Here it is intensely interesting for us to look into Joseph's mind, and get an understanding of his outlook upon life. The meaning of suffering is luminous to him, and he hastens to make it clear to others. He sees God's hand in what He has permitted as well as in what He has appointed. He sees that his brothers' actions have merely been links in a wonderful chain of providence, by which God has fulfilled His purpose of grace. He sees that slave-dealing Ishmaelites, Potiphar and his faithless wife, Pharaoh and his forgetful butler, dreams and interpretations, plenty and famine, have been other links in the chain. He believes that every man's life is a plan of God. He knows that God does not violate men's freedom ; they are responsible moral beings, who choose good or evil with open eyes ; yet all their actions are woven into the plans of that amazing providence which transcends the vision of men while it shapes to nobler ends their rough and rude designs. This is a truth which all men need to know. Many people miss the meaning and the blessing of life because they never see beyond the malignity of second

causes. They are blinded by passion. They cry out against human depravity. It is as if Joseph said in wrath: 'Simeon and Levi did this, the villains! Potiphar's wife did that, the adulteress! The chief butler did the other thing, the ingrate!' We know that Joseph had no such thoughts in his mind. To one and all he could calmly say: 'You have neither made nor marred my life; I can neither thank nor blame you; it was not you, but God, that did it all.' The same thought runs through all the finest Hebrew literature. 'This also cometh from the LORD, who is wonderful in counsel and excellent in working.'[1] Only inspired thinkers, men of great faith and profound reflection, could ever have reached such a grand and tranquillising conclusion.

HUMILITY.—Joseph has to speak to his brothers of his own wonderful success, and to ask them to carry tidings of it to his father. He tells them that he has become a 'father'[2]—counsellor and benefactor—to Pharaoh, master of all the royal house, and ruler over all the land of Egypt (v.[8]). 'Ye shall tell my father,' he says, 'of all my glory in Egypt, and of all that ye have seen' (v.[13]). Does this sound like boasting? Hebrew history of a much later date tells of a great man who was made to eat grass like the oxen for seven years because he boasted of the might of his power and the glory of his majesty.[3] But Joseph is not a man of that stamp. He is entirely free from the taint of boastfulness, and for a simple and sufficient reason: he praises God as the Author of all his greatness. 'He hath made me a father to Pharaoh. . . . Haste ye and go up to my father, and say to him, This saith thy son Joseph, God hath made me lord of all Egypt' (vv.[8, 9]). He knows that nothing delights a simple-hearted father like tidings of a son's success in the great world. But he does not proudly boast that he is a self-made man; he realises and acknowledges that he is a God-made man. We remember he had a youthful presentiment that he was destined to greatness; yet, when greatness comes to him, no one seems to be more surprised at it

[1] Isa. 28[29]. [2] Compare our 'city fathers.' [3] Dan. 4[30].

than himself. It is the LORD'S doing, and it is wonderful in his eyes. 'For neither from the east, nor from the west, nor yet from the south, cometh promotion ; but God is the judge ; He putteth down one, and lifteth up another.' God shows Himself willing to put the reins of government into the hands of a man who will always use it for His glory.

LOVE.—Joseph has tried to comfort his brethren with words. But somehow the wisest and kindest speeches fail to cheer the heart in its darkest and deepest sorrows. There are, however, other means which do not fail. Joseph lets Nature have her way. 'He fell upon his brother Benjamin's neck and wept ; and Benjamin wept upon his neck. And he kissed all his brethren, and wept upon them' (vv.[14, 15]). Till this moment his brethren have been tongue-tied. What have guilty creatures to say when they stand before their judge with all their sin found out? They are conscience-stricken ; they are covered with confusion and shame ; they cannot, they dare not, speak a word. But now what signify those warm-flowing tears in the eyes of the man whom they have wronged? And those kisses—what message do they convey to the hearts of the unhappy culprits? They convince them of what seemed before incredible—that the man before whom they stand condemned and miserable is more than a judge, more than a benefactor, he is a tender-hearted brother still. 'And *after that* his brethren spake to him' (v.[15]). Genuine tears have a kind of magical virtue, without which the most charitable words and deeds are comparatively powerless to dissolve the barriers which have long divided those who ought to be friends. For genuine tears can only come from a whole-hearted love. Coleridge is right when he says :

> 'He that works me good with unmoved face
> Does it but half ; he chills me while he aids,—
> My benefactor, not my brother man.'

XVI.

ATTAINMENT.

GEN. XLV. 26–XLVI.

'With still a flying point of bliss remote,
A happiness in store afar, a sphere
Of distant glory still in view.'

BROWNING.

FORGIVENESS.—Jacob's sons come back from Egypt like men in a dream. As they ride across the desert, they have in their hearts the incredible comfort of forgiveness. They have on their lips the kiss of peace. They are tasting the quality of mercy, and finding it sweet. They have experienced the joy of reconciliation. The nameless terror which has so long haunted their minds is gone, and their hearts are at rest. The gloom in which they have walked is dispelled, and their sky is clear and blue again. They now know that there is in the world a love of which they have hitherto had little or no conception, a love which uplifts even while it humbles, forgives even while it condemns. As they think of all they have seen and heard they are lost in wonder. Something of their bitter remorse and shame will remain; but in the end it must be swallowed up in the sense of a brotherly love which weeps and heals and blesses, and a Divine charity which in some mysterious way brings only good out of evil.

HOPE.—When Jacob received his sons at the door of his tent he eagerly scanned their faces to see if they had all come home. He saw that Benjamin was there, and Simeon was there, and that they were all happy, and had evidently fared better than they expected. But now what amazing tidings were these that they poured into his ears? 'Joseph is yet alive, and he is ruler over all the land of Egypt' (v.[26]). The old man listened, and 'his heart fainted.' He would have fallen if some strong arm had not supported

him. The sudden shock his mind received well-nigh made his heart cease to beat. For twenty years he had mourned for Joseph as one who was 'without doubt torn in pieces.' If he had for a while cherished the forlorn hope that he might still see his son alive, the hope had long since perished. And as eyes long accustomed to darkness are blinded by excess of light, so hearts that have made grief their element grow faint at tidings of joy. It is not easy to turn back the whole tide and current of one's habitual thoughts and feelings. Jacob 'would not believe' his sons' message. His imagination refused to entertain the idea presented to it. His mind reeled under the weight of an inconceivable joy. Joseph alive and ruling a nation! It was incredible, it was preposterous, it was a cruel and bitter jest. And yet, here is Benjamin clad in the richest apparel of Egypt; here are beasts of burden laden with the treasures of the Nile; and here are wagons enough to transport the largest household over the desert. These are substantial things which cannot be explained away. The voices of the messengers, too, have an unmistakable ring of truth. These men evidently believe what they say; and as they fill in their narrative with more and more circumstantial details, Joseph the ruler of Egypt at last becomes visible to the old man's astonished imagination. Jacob's spirit revives (v.[27]). His eye rekindles. He has something yet to live for. Southward he sees gleaming a beacon of hope, and his resolution is quickly formed. He has been a wanderer all his life, and he will wander once more. 'It is enough: Joseph my son is yet alive: I will go down and see him before I die.'

> 'Death closes all: but something ere the end,
> Some work of noble note, may yet be done . . .
> 'Tis not too late to seek a newer world.' [1]

GUIDANCE.—When Jacob began this journey southward, his mind was visited by certain natural fears which made him pause. Eager as he was to see his son, he wondered if it was right for

[1] Tennyson's 'Ulysses.'

him to leave the land of promise. It was Joseph's will and Pharaoh's that he should come down to Egypt; and it was his own will to go; but what was God's will? It was a hazardous movement, both for himself and his people, on which he was venturing. He had reason to be afraid of Egypt. Abraham had gone down to it, and had not come back with honour. Isaac had been forbidden to go (26[2]). Jacob was offered the rich lands of Goshen, the finest in Egypt, as a dwelling-place; but in the Vale of Shechem, the finest in Canaan, the Hebrews had not done well, and might they not meet with still greater temptations in Egypt? If Jacob left the land of promise, ought he not to go by faith, with a sense of God's presence and guidance? Under the influence of these thoughts and feelings, Jacob comes to Beersheba, where he lifts up his heart in the act of sacrifice to the God of his father Isaac. Once more a night-vision brings him light, and convinces him that he is on the right path. His Divine Guardian promises to go down with him to Egypt, to make of him a great nation there, to bring him (that is, his people) up again, and to give himself the comfort of having his son Joseph with him at the last (vv.[3. 4]). His fears are dispelled; he sees the guiding hand of God.

Reunion.—Jacob went down with all the Hebrews to Egypt, and 'sent Judah before him to Joseph, that he (Joseph) might show him (Jacob) the way unto Goshen' (v.[28]). Judah was chosen for this interview because he was fittest and worthiest. There were no two princelier men living in the world at that time than Joseph and Judah. They had risen by merit to the pre-eminence among the sons of Jacob. Judah delivers his message to his brother, and then comes the most touching scene in the Book of Genesis. 'Joseph made ready his chariot, and went up to meet his father; and fell on his neck, and wept on his neck a good while' (v.[29]). At last, at last, father and son meet again. They do not speak; they crowd all their pent-up love into a long embrace; and somehow the fullest tides of gladness always touch the source of tears. But the sadness of hearts over-happy is no intolerable pain!

For a companion picture we have to take this one of another son: 'And he arose and came to his father. And when his father saw him, he had compassion on him, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him.'[1] One son comes back to his father's embrace with all life's battles won, crowned with glory and honour. Another comes back with all life's battles lost, his honour trailed in the dust. The love which welcomes the one is as great, if not quite as wonderful, as the love which welcomes the other. But can we doubt for a moment that the stainless life is the ideal for every son whose career in the world, with all its infinite possibilities, lies still before him?

ATTAINMENT.—'Now let me die,' are Jacob's first words when Joseph at last releases him from his close, warm embrace. Till this rapturous day, death has seemed to him a thing to be dreaded rather than desired. But the ecstatic moment has come; he has quaffed the full cup of earthly joy; he has reached the summit of being; and now without a murmur he could lie down and die. Let death come to him when it will, it cannot now be untimely. He has lived, and loved, and been loved. He has won the prize of life; let death crown him. 'Thus with a kiss I die,' says one of Shakespeare's people. Pessimists think it must be good to die because life is so empty. Optimists think it must be good to die because life is so full. 'One crowded hour of glorious life,' and then—death! When the eye is satisfied with seeing, the ear with hearing, and the heart with loving, the silver cord may well be loosed.

> 'Glad did I live, and gladly I die,
> And I lay me down with a will.'[2]

The classical illustration of this feeling is the most sacred of all. 'When the parents brought in the child Jesus, then Simeon received Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, Now lettest Thou Thy servant depart, O Lord, in peace: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation.'[3]

[1] Luke 15^{20}. [2] Stevenson. [3] Luke 2^{27-30}.

XVII.

SERVICE.

GEN. XLVII.-XLVIII. 20.

'Therefore to him it was given
Many to save with himself.'—ARNOLD.

GOSHEN.—Jacob and his sons have the land of Goshen assigned to them as a dwelling-place. Pharaoh makes it over to them, for Joseph's sake, with a royal good will. He is exuberant in his expressions of kindly feeling and his assurances of what he will do for them. He is giving them 'the good of the land of Egypt'; they are to eat 'the fat of the land' (45^{18}); they are to dwell in 'the best of the land' (47^{6}). The rich alluvial plains of Goshen, the garden of Egypt, the proverbial land of plenty, become the resting-place of the Hebrews. In this goodly heritage, under the fostering care of a benignant monarch and his viceroy, they will rapidly increase in numbers and in power; and here in the providence of God they are destined to sojourn for centuries, until they become a great nation.

KINGSHIP.—The Hebrews were to be workers, not idlers, in the land of plenty. Some of them obtained an interview with Pharaoh, and the king's first question was, 'What is your occupation?' (47^{3}). When he learned that they were shepherds, he bade Joseph pick out the ablest of them and make them rulers over his cattle. The royal herds grazed on the pasture-land of Goshen, and the sons of Jacob, that cleverest of stock-breeders, would make excellent graziers. The fact that this Pharaoh was himself of Shemitic origin—one of the Hyksos or Shepherd kings—made him partial to Hebrews and shepherds. He had a quick eye for 'any able men' (v.[6]), men of knowledge, capacity, energy, the best that could be found

to do his work. Nothing so clearly indicates a man's fitness for the business of kingship as his unerring judgment in the choice of his servants. Pharaoh finds the right man to be 'ruler' over his people, and the right men to be 'rulers' over his cattle; and if he finds the right men for all the intervening offices of state, he cannot fail to be one of the most successful monarchs of the land.

GREATNESS.—Joseph brought his father into the palace, and presented him to Pharaoh. The meeting between the Egyptian king and the Hebrew patriarch is one of those traditional incidents which can never cease to strike the imagination of mankind. Many other presentations — of princes, nobles, ambassadors—had taken place, and would yet take place, at that Egyptian court, but they have all been forgotten, while this alone is remembered. The scene represents the ideals of kingliness and saintliness. The two most eminent men in the world meet and converse as equals. Rank and power, titles and dignities fade into nothingness when they realise their common humanity. Days and years, earth and its pilgrimage, good and evil, are the same to a king and a shepherd. If there is a difference, Jacob is the greater of the two. Pharaoh counts it an honour to receive his blessing, 'and without dispute the less is blessed of the better.'[1] All the characteristics of Egypt and Israel are embodied in these representative men. Pharaoh stands for a nation which has long excelled, and is destined yet to excel, in secular wisdom and power; Jacob, for a people who are destined to attain spiritual greatness, blessing others because they themselves have power with God and prevail.

LIFE.—'How many,' the king asks the patriarch, 'are the days of the years of thy life?' The question is somehow tenderly suggestive of the silvery hairs and wistful eyes and tottering steps of extreme old age. Jacob's years are evidently many. But his answer seems to come with a sigh: 'Few and

[1] Heb. 7^7.

evil have been the days of the years of my life' (v.[8]). That life is so short and so sad is the universal complaint. What is Jacob's life, Pharaoh's, any man's? A pilgrimage, a tale that is told, a handbreadth, a dream, a sleep, a vapour, a shadow, a fading flower, a wind, nothing, vanity. That is empirical life as all men find it. 'What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue!'[1]

> 'A moment's halt, a momentary taste,
> Of being from the well amid the waste,
> And, lo! the phantom caravan has reached
> The nothing it set out from—Oh, make haste.'[2]

Is life itself, then, evil? Does Jacob, whose days have been few and evil, think so? Is he one of 'the weary pessimists, life's tired-out guests,' who cry that life is not worth living. No, it is only *his* life, or any actual man's life, that is evil. Life, the gift of God, is worthy of the Giver. To every true Hebrew and every true man life is essentially, wonderfully good—if only it were longer, and we better! Our sorrowful complaint that our days are few and evil is the pathetic evidence of the presence in every human soul of a craving for life as God meant it to be—an ideal, a perfect life. We hunger and thirst for it—for a life sweet and pure and everlasting.

> 'Whatever crazy sorrow saith,
> No life that breathes with human breath
> Has ever truly longed for death.
>
> 'Tis life, whereof our nerves are scant,
> Oh life, not death, for which we pant;
> More life, and fuller, that I want.'[3]

STATESMANSHIP.—As a stateman, Joseph took hold of Egyptian affairs with both hands. There was a steady resistless force in his movements and actions. 'He went throughout all the land of Egypt.' He was here, there, and everywhere. His name was known and his power felt by prince and peasant. He had to rule a populace now faint, now frantic, with hunger. From Nubia to the sea he heard that saddest of cries, 'Give us

[1] Burke. [2] Omar Khayyam. [3] Tennyson.

bread,' and he had to be the dispenser of blessing to millions. He resolved that none should perish of want. The work required a vast, organising, far-seeing genius, and he proved equal to the task. He won the eulogies which are bestowed on a great ruler by a grateful nation. 'Thou hast saved our lives,' they said; and when they cried 'Abrech,' and bowed the knee to him, it was not the mechanical homage of servile fear, but the sincere reverence of whole-hearted gratitude. As an administrator, Joseph has sometimes been accused of abusing his power, of snatching an unfair advantage in a time of national distress, of creating a 'corner' in wheat, and compelling a hungry people to pay extortionate prices. There is no real ground for bringing these charges against him. His contemporaries were better judges of his policy than we can be, and they were unanimous in their praise of his administration. What he did as a famine-minister was to sell corn first for money, then for cattle, and then for service. At the same time he seized the occasion to do a thing which probably greatly needed to be done—to nationalise the land. He made the proprietors of the soil 'servants' of the crown, tenant-farmers who paid a fifth of the produce of the land as a rent—an extremely moderate tax when the Nile Valley is yielding its normal harvest. 'The power of the old aristocracy was broken as completely as it has been in Japan in our own day,'[1] and probably with as good results. It is by such master-strokes of wise and energetic legislation that statesmen convert the passing misfortunes which visit a nation into great and permanent blessings.

FUTURITY.—Jacob lived seventeen years in Egypt, and then the time drew near when he must die (47^{28}). And he said to Joseph, 'Bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt; but when I sleep with my fathers, thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their burying-place' (vv.$^{29, 30}$). It is evident that the two things, Jacob's sleeping with his fathers, and his being buried in the cave

[1] Sayce.

of Machpelah, are perfectly distinct. He will sleep with his fathers: God will see to that. The disposal of his body will follow: Joseph will see to that. The spirit will return to God who gave it, and dust mingle with kindred dust. But what is meant by sleeping with one's fathers? Sleep is in every language the natural image of death. When a Greek poet says of one of his heroes, 'He slept an iron sleep,' and an English poet of one of our kings, 'After life's fitful fever he sleeps well,' our thoughts scarcely go beyond the sleep-like stillness of the body. But the Hebrew idea of sleeping with one's fathers meant more. It took the imagination as far as it could go into the unseen world. It indicated the prevailing belief in a Beyond or Hereafter where the fathers were in some sense still alive. In regard to the other world, there are two things about which we Christians feel certain—first, that the dead are alive; and, second, that they are with God. Of the first of these things the Hebrews had no doubt; of the second they were far from sure. To them, death was a going to the fathers; to us, it is a going to the Father. The difference is immense; but between the meagre Shemitic idea and the full Christian faith there were the intuitions and instincts which prompted the larger Hebrew hope that after death there would not be less but more of the Divine Presence. 'I shall sleep with my fathers' was not a satisfying, though a peaceful, thought; but the Hebrew saint learned ere long to say, 'I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with Thy likeness.'[1]

RETROSPECT.—A dying man's backward glance upon the life he is leaving is always full of interest. What incidents of the way does he recall at the end of the journey? What scenes stand out fresh before his mind when others have faded away? What voices, long hushed, does he now hear? When Joseph takes his two sons to see their grandfather, he finds him reminiscent of far off things and days of long ago ($48^{3.\ 7}$). And Jacob

[1] Ps. 17^{15}.

tells his son what he sees. Two Places and two Persons crowd out everything else from his vision—Bethel, where God appeared to him, and Ephrath, where Rachel was taken from him. Faith and love—a great religious blessing and a tender earthly happiness—have made him the man he is, and sum up his life. Two supreme experiences have become an integral part of his being, and can only perish if the soul itself dies. There have been times when his better nature has almost been swamped by sordid and selfish cares. But his ideals have saved him. No man who believes with all his soul can ever remain sordid, and no man who loves with all his heart can ever remain selfish.

SHEPHERDING.—In token of a great love, Jacob adopts Joseph's two boys as his own (48^5), thereby giving his favourite son a double heritage—the portion of a firstborn among the tribes of Israel. Joseph then brings his sons to receive the patriarch's kiss and blessing ($v.^9$). No children ever got a more precious legacy to carry with them through life than these two. The benediction is perhaps the finest ever uttered by dying lips. Jacob puts into it his most thankful and joyful thoughts about God. He invokes Him as the God before whom his fathers walked—the God of history; as the God who has shepherded himself all his life long—the God of providence; as the Angel who has redeemed him from all evil—the God of grace; and he prays Him who has been all this and done all this to bless the lads ($vv.^{15.\ 16}$). Past, present, and future are sweetly linked together in the blessing. The God who has been tried and proved by the old who are going to their rest, will show Himself as gracious to the young who are rising up to take their places. Jacob's Shepherd, who has been tending and leading and feeding him so long, will do just the same for the lambs of His flock. Our English version misses something of the beauty of Jacob's words. The translation 'who hath fed me' is too meagre. We need to say, 'who hath shepherded me.' The same word is the keynote of the finest of all the Psalms: 'The

Lord is my shepherd.' It is a beautiful metaphor, which comes with an exquisite pathos and a profound significance from the lips of a dying shepherd. The poets of a later age could only echo his words: 'Give ear, O Shepherd of Israel, Thou that leadest Joseph like a flock.'[1] All the tender grace of the Old Testament religion is found in this lovely conception. It was not one man or two, but a whole nation that learned to believe in God as a Shepherd: 'We are His people, the sheep of His pasture.'[2] No other ancient nation ever expected from God such loving care and unerring guidance, no other nation ever promised such meek submission and faithful following. And while the Hebrew temple and sacrifice and priesthood have passed away as the shadows of better things, the Hebrew thought of a Shepherd-God will live for ever.

REDEMPTION.—The succeeding words of the benediction are equally fine: 'The Angel[3] who hath redeemed me from all evil bless the lads' (v.^{16}). Much would have been lacking if Jacob had not spoken these words. They are of the nature of a palinode; in speaking them he recants certain things which he said before. In his dark days he spoke in dirge-like tones of trouble and sorrow, gray hairs and Sheol; he counted his many miseries, and said that all these things were against him (42^{36}). But in the retrospect he sees that he was wrong. All things have worked together for his good, and God has in His mercy redeemed him from all evil. As the ransomed of the Lord he has obtained joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing have fled away. So his dying testimony pulsates with gratitude and hope. Let Joseph's sons know that life is good to every one who has a Redeemer. In our saddest days we would pass on to others the pessimist's gloomy creed:

> 'The happiest youth, viewing his progress through,
> What perils past, what crosses to ensue,
> Would shut the book and set him down and die.'[4]

[1] Ps. 80^{1}. [2] Ps. 100^{3}. [3] Vol. i. p. 91. [4] Shakespeare.

But the real lesson of life is the optimist's cheerful faith :

> 'That the procession of our fate, howe'er
> Sad or disturbed, is ordered by a Being
> Of infinite benevolence and power,
> Whose everlasting purposes embrace
> All accidents, converting them to Good.'[1]

SOVEREIGNTY.—Jacob is represented as crossing his hands in the act of blessing Joseph's sons, thus putting his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left on Manasseh's. Joseph supposes that his father is doing this unconsciously, as if it were the natural mistake of a frail or an absent-minded man, and tries to correct him. But Jacob's mind has never been clearer or stronger than it is in these last days. He does not need to be told which is the firstborn : 'I know it, my son, I know it.' He is guiding his hands quite wittingly ; and tradition represents him as thus symbolically foretelling that Ephraim will have a nobler name and a greater power than Manasseh. Genesis seems to be written for the purpose of overturning all our ordinary ideas of the rights of primogeniture. It advocates the divine rights of younger sons. It teaches us that God's choice is rarely pitched where man's would be. God prefers Isaac to Ishmael, Jacob to Esau, Judah to Reuben, Ephraim to Manasseh. Even the modern principle of the careers open to the talents falls short of the Divine method of working ; for God often passes by men of the most brilliant gifts, and uses the most unlikely instruments to do His work. Not that He ever acts arbitrarily ; He has a reason for all His actions and all His choices. But He exercises His sovereignty and bids us exercise our faith. 'None can stay His hand, or say unto Him, What doest Thou?'[2]

[1] Wordsworth. [2] Dan. 4^{35}.

XVIII.

FAREWELL.

GEN. XLVIII. 21–XLIX.

'O! but they say the tongues of dying men
Enforce attention like deep harmony:
Where words are scarce, they are seldom spent in vain.'
SHAKESPEARE.

DEPARTURE.—Jacob's old age is serene and grand. We found little in his youthful character to admire except the one great quality of faith in the unseen; but that faith has gradually transfigured him, making the last part of his life the best. No other deathbed scene is so vividly depicted in the Old Testament as that of which he is the centre, and it is not in the least gloomy or depressing. On the contrary, his end is calm and majestic, like the setting of a summer sun, which is never so grand and beautiful as just before it disappears. He makes an ideal departure, which will teach multitudes of Hebrews in all ages how to 'yield up the breath.' The Hereafter might be dim and uncertain, but the present life, at any rate, was something great and holy, a wondrous gift from God, a glad and glorious experience to be taken leave of with high solemnity and dignity. Let the end of life be what it might, it was not the bursting of a bubble, the fading of a dream, the turning down of an empty glass. On this side it was a saint's calm surrender of his spirit into the hands of a faithful Creator; what it was on the other side he could not tell; he went to see.

HOPE.—By faith Jacob, when a-dying, leaves his children a legacy of hope in God. He looks upward in faith and forward in expectancy. His religion makes him sanguine and prophetic. 'Behold,' he said, 'I die, but God shall be with you' (48^{21}). The words are suggestive of infinite possibilities. The One

remains while the many change and pass. When man dies, God lives on, and faith in the real presence of a living God is the spring of eternal hope. Faith is the power by which men grasp the future, the unseen, the Divine, by which they maintain their expectant look, by which they remain optimists in spite of all the evil of the world. Dying saints are enabled to bequeath messages of comfort to after ages, because they are sure that the God who has so greatly blessed themselves has greater blessings in store for their posterity. True religion bids them expect a brighter day to dawn and a happier society to come into being. Jacob, dying in Goshen, the proverbial land of plenty, sees something still better than Goshen. His conviction of the goodness of God kindles an ardent and unquenchable hope of the amelioration of the state of his people. The vision of God is always accompanied by the vision of a better and happier world.

CHARACTERS.—The forty-ninth chapter of Genesis is usually entitled the Blessing of Jacob. The designation is not strictly accurate, as some of the utterances contained in it are judgments rather than blessings. It is sometimes called the Last Will and Testament of Jacob. It is really a great and ancient poem, terse in expression, vivid in imagery, in which, while individuals are addressed, we may see the personified tribes of Israel mirrored as they actually appeared in the days of the Judges and the beginning of the monarchy. The characterisations are keen and trenchant, such as a quick-witted and full-blooded people delight in. If the criticism is unsparing, the appreciation is generous. No doubt every phrase became ere long proverbial, and the portraits served as types to imitate or to avoid. Tribes and nations, as well as individuals, have characters to keep or to lose. Some have virtues which mark them out for success and happiness ; others have vices which doom them to failure and sorrow. One tribe is lacking in moral strength, a second in love, a third in enterprise ; and, while prophecy may pronounce their doom, their

own weaknesses are their real curse. Others, strong in character, rich in grace, abounding in energy, are helped by the Mighty God of Jacob, and win for themselves great happiness and renown.

CHASTITY.—Jacob is represented as denouncing some of his sons with the stern sad anger of a Hebrew prophet. The three eldest are failures. Reuben the firstborn had every natural advantage—the right of primogeniture, his father's strength, a certain native dignity and power. His youth was full of promise, and he might easily have retained the pre-eminence. He had good impulses and much kindness of heart; he was averse to inflicting pain, and easily moved to tears. But he forfeited all his advantages, lost his supremacy, and sank into obscurity, through lack of self-control. Unstable as water, he could not excel (v.[4]). He vitiated his nature by animal passion. He made himself vile and despicable. He was wanting in the first attribute of manhood—chivalrous respect for the honour of womanhood. He let lust extinguish the light and glory of his soul. He transmitted to his posterity a vicious taint which they never eradicated. While other tribes were rising in power and fame, Reuben was decrepit and decadent. No judge, or prophet, or ruler had Reuben's blood flowing in his veins. Sensuality enervated the race, and Reuben became effete.

> 'Methinks I am a prophet now inspired,
> And thus expiring do fortell of him:
> His rash fierce blaze of riot cannot last,
> For violent fires soon burn out themselves.'[1]

BROTHERHOOD.—Simeon and Levi are characterised as 'brethren,' or kindred spirits, in evil. In their secret societies they hatched conspiracies so dark and foul that all good men were constrained to avoid them. 'O my soul, come not thou into their council; unto their assembly, my glory, be not thou

[1] Shakespeare.

united' (v.[6]). The soul of man, here wonderfully called his 'glory'—that divine radiance or image within him which it is his task and duty to keep undimmed—would be darkened almost as much by a hatred like Simeon's as by a lust like Reuben's. The swords of Simeon and Levi are weapons of violence. Jacob denounces their vindictive spirit, their fierce anger and cruel wrath. Their treacherous slaughter of men and senseless mutilation of cattle at Shechem have not been forgotten. Their character will work out its own punishment. They will be divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel (v.[7]). While love is a uniting, hatred is a disintegrating, force. Conspirators are notoriously suspicious of one another, the same selfish spirit which makes them ruthless to their enemies making them also jealous of their friends. They stand by each other only so long as self-interest unites them. The violent man finds himself in the end alone. Brethren in evil are brethren only in name.

DOMINION.—With glowing colours and warm enthusiasm the poem describes the greatness, the glory, the prosperity of Judah. He bears a great name, of which he is worthy. He is victorious in battle: we see his hand upon the neck of his prostrate foes, and his brethren bowing before him in lowly submission. He is powerful as a couchant lion, and on his mountain fastnesses no one dares to disturb him. He receives into his strong hand the sceptre of dominion, and he will never let it slip till a heaven-sent Peace-bringer shall come, when he shall at length gather the peoples and unite them in willing obedience. His happy abode is described as a land flowing with wine and milk (vv.[8-12]). The vigorous metaphors of the first part of the prophecy are easy to understand. They exactly describe the proud position won for Judah by the military genius of David. We cannot be so certain of the meaning of the word Shiloh; but it is probably connected—like Salem, Siloam, Solomon—with the root-word which signifies peace. If so, the idea is both intelligible and beautiful. In the land of Canaan, whose

mountains and valleys were the scenes of almost endless civil and international strife, peace was the ideal state for which all good men longed and prayed. If God would only send a Prince of Peace to end all cruel and bloody wars, then the sovereignty of Judah would find its fitting consummation, as the material power of a great dynasty would be merged in a vaster kingdom of grace! This is one of the greatest ideals which came from the heart of the Hebrew race. Has it been realised? Judah certainly won and retained the sceptre. His prophets and poets, more than his kings, became the spiritual leaders of mankind—'dead but sceptred sovereigns who still rule our spirits.' The land of Judah (Judea) became the most sacred country, and the sons of Judah (Judeans, contracted to Jews) the most wonderful race, that the world has seen. And out of that land and that people the great Peace-bringer at length came. 'Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise' (v.[8]). It has been well said that 'the name of Joseph, first among the sons of Jacob at the beginning of the nation, grows pale as history advances before the name of Judah. Even the great word Israel dies before it. It is the Jews, the men of Judah, that fill the records of the world.'[1]

SEAMANSHIP.—Zebulon is regarded as the father of a maritime race. 'He (his people) shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he (his land) shall be for a haven (or beach) of ships; and his border shall be upon Zidon' (v.[13]). His children shall be familiar with the sound of clashing waves and the glory of setting suns. They shall do business on great waters, and trade with foreign lands. They are bidden elsewhere to 'rejoice' in their 'going out,'[2] that is, in the enterprises of a seafaring life. They shall 'suck the abundance of the sea'[3]—a more graphic touch than our 'reaping the harvest of the sea.' Dwelling not far from Zidon, the great maritime city of the Phœnicians, they in some respects resemble their powerful neighbours. It should be observed, however, that Zebulon was isolated among the Hebrew tribes

[1] Stopford Brooke. [2] Deut. 33[18]. [3] Deut. 33[19]

in his naval pursuits. Israel as a whole never took to the sea, never became a sea-loving nation like Greece or England. Handicapped by the absence of natural harbours, they never had a fleet worth speaking of, and never fought a naval battle. They had their dwelling by the sea, but never their home on it.

STRENUOUSNESS.—Issachar's portrait is drawn with a few plain, masterly strokes. He was a husbandman, strong, easy-going, indolent. In his rich inland valleys he led a life of placid content. 'He saw a resting-place that it was good, and the land that it was pleasant'(v.[15]). He entered into possession, and had his heart's desire. He was pricked by no higher ambition. He should have been as strenuous as he was strong; but with wealth and comfort apparently secure, he did not see why he should exert himself overmuch. He loved the ignoble ease which has been called the vice of rich lowlands all the world over. In one trenchant phrase he is described as 'a strong ass.' He was well aware of his strength, but did not know that he was an ass. In the end he paid the price of indolence. As he was stretching his lazy length 'between the sheepfolds,' he forgot that his goods needed guarding. The lassitude which disinclined him for labour equally incapacitated him for self-defence; and when strangers cast their covetous eyes upon his fat acres and swooped down upon his peaceful homesteads, he and his possessions become an easy prey to the spoiler. And then, as he would not toil for himself when he was his own master, he must even toil for another master, 'bowing his shoulder to bear, and becoming a servant under taskwork' (v.[15]). So Issachar becomes a warning rather than an example. He points the moral that 'the prosperity (or careless ease) of fools shall destroy them.'[1]

'Then, welcome each rebuff
That turns earth's smoothness rough,

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[1] Prov. 1[32].

> Each sting that bids not sit nor stand, but go!
> Be our joys three parts pain!
> Strive, and hold cheap the strain;
> Learn, nor account the pang; dare, never grudge the throe.'[1]

WARFARE.—Geographical conditions tended to make one tribe mercantile, another industrial, another military. Dan and Gad are both warlike, and none the less dangerous that they are small. 'Dan shall judge (defend) his people, as one of the tribes of Israel' (v.[16]). Dan became famous as a border raider. From his bare highland fastnesses he would make a sudden descent upon the rich plains of Philistia and return laden with spoil. His hero was Samson. The metaphor in which the tribe is described is graphic. Dan is an adder (horned snake) lurking in the way, which darts out and bites the passing horse's heels, making him madly plunge and throw his rider in the dust (v.[17]). The figure gives us the idea of a subtle, stealthy race, which knows how to lie low and bide its time, and then strike a blow with deadly effect. Gad is equally warlike, but gains his victories by more open means. There is a play upon his name, which resembles the word for a troop. 'Gad, a troop shall troop upon him, but he shall troop upon their heels' (v.[19]). It is not wise to underrate his skill or valour. When he seems to be having the worst of it, he knows how to turn the tide of battle and drive his enemies in headlong confusion.

HAPPINESS.—Asher, as his name indicates, is in many respects 'happy.' He dwells in the fertile plain of Jezreel, the garden of Palestine. He is described in the Blessing of Moses as 'dipping his foot in oil.'[2] He has enough, and more than enough, of earth's richest products, so that he can send exports to his neighbours; and kings are pleased to have his dainties on their tables (v.[20]). Nothing is here said of the spirit of Asher; but we learn elsewhere that he, like Issachar, was too fond of ease, and that in times of national peril he proved recreant.[3]

[1] Browning. [2] Deut. 33^{24}. [3] Judg. $5^{17, 18}$.

He never furnished a hero to the Hebrew race; and for all he was called so happy, he missed the glory and the joy which only the brave and self-sacrificing know.

LIBERTY.—Naphtali is a northern mountaineer, dwelling 'upon the high places of the field.'[1] He has a highlander's love of liberty, and is ready—as we see in the instance of Barak, the tribal hero—to risk all in its defence. He is compared to 'a hind let loose,' gambolling at its sweet will, breasting the steep mountain side, breathing the free air of heaven. The beautiful figure 'fully expresses the feelings which are bred by the health, the spaciousness, the high freedom and glorious outlook of Upper Galilee.'[2] Naphtali has, in addition, the gift of graceful and forcible speech—'he giveth goodly words.' In the absence of any historical explanation of this sentence, we may find some pleasure in a poet's fancy. Jacob was wearily awaiting the second return of his sons from Egypt, when suddenly one of them bounded into his presence.

> ''Twas Naphtali who hastened,
> And, ere the rest arrived,
> Poured into Jacob's wondering ears
> Sweet news, to wrestle with his fears,
> How Joseph still survived.
>
> When Jacob lay a-dying,
> At sight of Naphtali
> The memory of the past returned,
> The runner was again discerned
> As in the hour gone by.
>
> Then thus the father blessed him,
> " Like hind 'mong mountain herds
> Outstripping all, art thou my son,
> Thou didst thy brethren all outrun,
> Thou broughtest goodly words!" '[3]

BLESSEDNESS.—The Blessing of Joseph is by itself a little poem of much beauty. In spirit it is at once patriotic and

[1] Judg. 5[18]. [2] G. A. Smith. [3] Poet's Bible.

religious. It praises the son who is worthy to receive a crowning blessing, extols the God who is his Guardian, and indicates the splendour of his heritage. Joseph is compared to a young fruit-tree (Ephraim meaning fruitful), a vine planted by a fountain, whose branches run over the wall—symbols of a fine race inhabiting a rich country and rapidly extending its borders. Joseph's prosperity provokes envious rivals, who sorely grieve him, shoot at him, and persecute him; but his own bow abides in strength, and his arms are upheld and strengthened by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob (v.[24]). The figure is simple and beautiful. As a father bends down over his young archer-boy, lays his great palm over the little hand that holds the bow, and instructs the child how to direct the arrow and draw the string, so Joseph has the great God behind him to teach and encourage him. Joseph alone would be weak as a child, but Joseph aided by the power and wisdom of God is unconquerable. For who is his God? 'The 'Mighty One of Jacob,' whose defence never faileth; 'the Shepherd' of Israel, who leadeth Joseph like a flock; and 'the Stone of Israel,' the Rock of Ages, against which all weapons are hurled in vain.

> 'Rock of the desert, prophet-sung,
> How grew its shadowing pile at length
> A symbol in the Hebrew tongue
> Of God's eternal love and strength!'[1]

This God will bless Joseph with blessings of heaven above—sunshine and wind, rain and dew; with blessings of the deep that couches beneath—fountains and streams issuing from the heart of the earth; and with blessings of the breast and of the womb—a vitality sufficient to fill the land. There is promised an exuberance of 'blessing,' in the strict sense of the word. The resources of nature are duly appreciated only when they are recognised as the gifts of God. Light and air, dew and rain, life and love, are common enough things; but they are transfigured when we see the hand of God bestowing them.

[1] Whittier.

'Thy bountiful care what tongue can recite?
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,
And sweetly distils in the dew and the rain.'

Finally, the blessings of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) are described as surpassing the blessings of the perpetual mountains and the treasures of the everlasting hills (v.[26]). For there are better things comprised in them than all nature's bountiful store. 'They include national and political greatness and the high religious privileges implied in the promises.'[1] The material wealth of the tribes may be great, but the people themselves, so long as they are brave in spirit and true to God, will be their country's real strength and pride.

STRENGTH.—'Benjamin is a wolf that ravineth: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at even he shall divide the spoil' (v.[27]). His home was up among the mountains of central Canaan, and his high, isolated position had a marked influence upon his habits and character. Hardy and brave, proud and resentful, he made no secret of his delight in war and plunder. His name meant 'son of the right hand,' and as if in sheer perversity he acquired a deadly proficiency in the use of the left hand; his slinging and archery became famous, and with his back to the wall he proudly defied all comers. The 'wolf' in him sometimes betrayed itself in acts of singular ferocity; but he put his strength to a nobler use in the Hebrew wars of liberation; and he gave the nation some of its noblest men.

SALVATION.—In the midst of these oracular utterances Jacob lifted up his eyes to heaven, and ejaculated the words, 'I have waited for Thy salvation, O Lord' (v.[18]). It is somewhat difficult to read the thought of the dying patriarch, and to define the salvation for which he longed. The waiting is easily understood. It was the characteristic attitude of all believing Hebrews,

[1] Driver.

living or dying. They waited, and they felt that it was good for them to wait, not in languid indifference, but with intense desire and eager hope, to see what God would do. Waiting was the attitude of people who had an ideal which they confidently expected to see realised, though there was sometimes an intense pathos in the use of the word, when hope deferred made the heart sick. Salvation is not so easy to interpret. When *we* hear a dying man say, 'I have waited for thy salvation,' we know that he is thinking of personal immortality. But we cannot be sure that this is the Hebrew idea. Just as the blessings which Jacob promises his sons are destined, not for themselves as individuals, but for the tribes of which they are to be the founders, so the salvation for which he has waited may be a happiness which is to be attained, not presently by himself, but in the distant future by the nation which shall trace its descent from him; in which case this earth will still be the scene of the salvation. 'One of the strangest things in the Old Testament is the little place which the individual feels he has, and his tendency to lose himself in larger wholes, such as the family and the nation. When in earlier times the individual approached death . . . he consoled himself with the thought that he did not all die, the memory of the righteous was blessed. He lived, too, in his children and in his people; he saw the good of Israel; his spirit lived and the work of his hands was established.'[1] On the other hand, there certainly came a time in the religious development of Israel when this oblivion of self was no longer possible. 'With the growing sense of God's greatness and power came the conception that even the realm of the dead was under His control, and that the righteous might still hope after death to see the salvation of God.'[2]

TEARS.—Jacob's latter end is peace. There is no timorous starting at the approach of death, no shrinking back from the unseen. The dying man calmly speaks of his being gathered

[1] A. B. Davidson. [2] Hastings' *Dict.*, art. 'Salvation.'

to his people, gives careful directions for his burial in Canaan, gathers up his feet upon his bed as if he were only going to sleep, yields up his spirit, and is gathered to his fathers. Yet death, however peaceful it may be, is a hard necessity. 'Joseph fell upon his father's face, and wept upon him, and kissed him' (50^1). Love must weep. The Book of Genesis indicates that man as we know him, man the image of God, ought to live for ever, death being an intruder upon the joy of life—the dark shadow of sin. Our instincts confirm this teaching. The heart untouched by grace can never really reconcile itself to the cruel stroke of Fate or the hard pressure of iron Law, can never do aught but hate 'the fell Fury with the accursed shears' that 'slits the thin-spun life'; and even the heart that trusts in the living God would break if it did not find relief in tears. The Egyptians, according to their custom, mourned for Jacob seventy days [1] (50^3), while the Hebrews themselves mourned but seven [2] (v.^{10}), and the difference may indicate that death was somewhat less awful to those who had the clearer and stronger faith. But the stern, inexorable fact remained. We can still see the long procession winding on, and across all the centuries hear that 'very great and sore lamentation.' Death needed to be abolished, life and immortality to be brought to light.[3]

XIX.

FAITH.

GEN. L. 14-26.

'All I have seen teaches me to trust the Creator for all I have not seen.'
EMERSON.

FORGIVENESS.—After their father's death Joseph's brethren become strangely restless. Their anxious looks betray the fact that their minds are haunted with gloomy fears. They

[1] So Herodotus. [2] 1 Sam. 31^{13}. [3] 2 Tim. 1^{13}.

somehow feel that a day of reckoning has come, and that terrible things are going to happen to them. They are tortured with morbid suspicions of their brother. Though he has remitted their transgression, though he has heaped favours upon them, though he has never given them the slightest reason to suppose that he is secretly harbouring a grudge against them, yet they fear him. They feel that it is too much to hope that he has absolutely and finally forgiven them. He must still in his heart of hearts be their enemy. It has been the fear of grieving their father that has restrained his anger during all those years; he must have been nursing a desire for vengeance in spite of all his apparent kindness; and now that his father's commanding influence is withdrawn, it is only too likely that his smouldering wrath will at last blaze out against them. They can talk of nothing else than this: 'It may be that Joseph will hate us, and will fully requite us all the evil we did unto him' (v.[15]). Their conscience is needlessly alarming them. 'There are they in great fear, where no fear is.'[1] Unable to banish their obstinate doubts, they at length send this message to Joseph: 'Thy father did command before he died, saying, So shall ye say unto Joseph, Forgive, I pray thee, the transgression of thy brethren, and their sin; for that they did unto thee evil: and now, we beseech thee, forgive the transgression of the servants of the God of thy father.' They could scarcely have pleaded more humbly if they had actually been under sentence of condemnation. They confess their 'transgression,' their 'sin,' the 'evil' they have done; and while they urge their father's dying behest, they plead the fact that they are Joseph's brothers and servants of Jacob's God. They can only hope that filial piety and the obligations of a common faith may constrain their brother to be merciful. It is no doubt forcible pleading; but the pity that it should for one moment seem necessary! Joseph listens with growing amazement. It is a sore disappointment to his sunny and generous nature to find

[1] Ps. 53[5].

that he is so greatly misunderstood. Are his brothers so incapable of appreciating true and warm love? Must they enlist their father on their side against him? Does he need the pressure of parental authority to keep him right—the dead hand to restrain him from deeds of vengeance? Have they really been regarding their father as the only bulwark between themselves and a brother's wrath? Must they persist in thinking of him as a judge and a foe? Yet their suspicions only serve to display the generous sympathy of his nature. As he realises what they have been suffering, he cannot keep back his tears. 'He wept when they spake unto him' (v.^{17}). These are not hot tears of wounded vanity and fretful impatience. They are tears of compassion, overflowing from a heart full of love. We read of many occasions on which Joseph weeps—when he hears his brothers' first confession (42^{24}), when he meets his young brother after a long separation (43^{30}), when he makes himself known to his brethren ($45^{14.\ 15}$), when he embraces his father again after many years (46^{29}), when he sees his father still in death (50^{1}), and now when his brothers doubt his love. It is never the thought of himself, but always the thought of others, that moves him. The strongest quality in Joseph's character is forgiving love. We see in him the personification of healing mercy and redeeming grace. It is 'the Christian spirit before the Christian time.'[1]

PARDON.—When Joseph's brethren fell down before his face and pleaded for mercy, he said to them, 'Fear not: for am I in the place of God?' (v.^{19}). His answer is at once far humbler and far more august than anything they looked for. They expected him to speak as a just, and it might be a merciful, judge. He speaks as a loving brother who is also a prophet of God. He turns their thoughts away from himself. He directs their minds upwards. He tells them it is with God rather than with man that they have to do. The meeting-place between the penitent soul and God is holy ground into

[1] F. W. Robertson.

which no man should ever dare to intrude. What saint or angel can stand in the place of God? Whoever puts himself, or lets others imagine that he puts himself, for a moment into that position is guilty of treason. Joseph will not do it. He refuses to acquit or to condemn. It is his part to forgive as far as man can, and he does so with all his heart and soul. From him there is nothing to fear. But man's forgiveness can never make an end of sin. Joseph's brethren, if they are wise, will go home thinking no more of Joseph. He cannot speak the word that will give them comfort and peace. They need to go and fall down before another Face and plead for mercy. They need to hear another Voice pronouncing their sentence of absolution. Who can cancel a sinner's debt, who can remit punishment, who can purge the soul from moral defilement, but God alone? And, on the other hand, where is the judge who can condemn, if God hath justified?

PROVIDENCE.—Joseph restates to his brothers his doctrine of providence, which is to penitent minds at once so humbling and so comforting. 'And as for you, ye meant evil against me; but God meant it for good, as it is this day, to save much people alive' (v.[20]). Joseph recognises more clearly than ever a divine order in the story of his troubled life. He sees a line of light shining through all deeds of darkness. He discerns a definite purpose to bring good out of evil. The very wrong which once occasioned 'the anguish of his soul' (42[21]), has wrought out results which fill his heart with gratitude. His brothers meant it for evil, God meant it for good. They were thinking only how they might blight the prospects of a brother whom they disliked; but God—who is the God of Egypt as well as of Israel—was thinking how He might save a multitude of people for whom He cared in a foreign land. The LORD permitted them to follow the devices of their own hearts, but wove all their schemes into the wonderful web of His own gracious providence. Man is free to do everything except one thing—to thwart God's purpose

of love. 'To the man who is not attuned to the will of God it is a thought full of dread that God has control of all the issues of life, the smallest and the greatest, the high and the low; but to the man who is willing to make his will God's will, it is a thought full of rest and peace.'[1] We may wonder how Joseph came to know so well, and to say so confidently, what God 'meant.' Though he may seem to be guilty of presumption, he is entirely free from it. He speaks what he knows. The truth is that there is a very intimate connection between doing and knowing. It is by faithful obedience to God's will that we gain a clear understanding of God's ways. Where a clever intellect fails to discover the hidden meanings of providence, a childlike and submissive heart succeeds. 'The secret of the LORD is with them that fear Him.'[2]

HOPE.—Joseph spent all his remaining years in Egypt. He lived to see his children of the third generation (v.[23]). When his end was drawing near, he spoke, as his father had done, words of hope. 'I die,' he said to his brethren, 'but God shall visit you, and bring you out of this land into the land which He sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob' (v.[24]). This is the dreamer's last dream, a waking dream. It is rather the prophecy of a believing heart, the vision of God's gracious working in the near or the distant future. The characteristic of waning life is said to be disenchantment. Old men in general are inclined to check the zeal and damp the ardour of their younger followers. A shrewd observer of life has said that youth is an illusion, manhood a struggle, old age a regret.[3] 'How many young men,' says a great idealist, 'have I not hailed at the commencement of their career, glowing with enthusiasm, and full of the poetry of great enterprises, whom I see to-day precocious old men, with the wrinkles of cold calculation on their brow; calling themselves free from illusion when they are only disheartened; and practical when they are only commonplace.'[4] But believing men

[1] Martineau. [2] Ps. 25[14]. [3] Disraeli. [4] Mazzini.

experience no disillusionment. The leaves of hope never wither on souls that are rooted in God. Joseph when dying looks forward with calm and perfect confidence, knowing that glorious things, and ever more glorious, must be, because God is. 'What is this Better, this flying Ideal, but the perpetual promise of the Creator?'[1] God lives though a hundred Josephs die. The two characteristics of the Hebrew mind were the upward and the forward look, the one directed to God in the present, the other to His coming in increasing power and grace in the future. Optimism was the distinction of the Hebrews. 'In the absence of Hope and of an ideal of progress, we strike upon one great difference between the classical Greeks and the Hebrews.'[2] Among the ancient races the Hebrew was like a watcher standing on a high mountain top, scanning the horizon and catching the first beams of coming day, while others were still hidden in darkness. The very heart-cry of the Hebrew race is heard in such words as these:

> 'My soul looketh for the LORD
> More than watchmen look for the morning;
> Yea, more than watchmen for the morning.'[3]

FAITH.—On his deathbed Joseph bound the children of Israel under an oath to carry his body out of Egypt at their exodus and bury him in the land of his fathers. In accordance with his wish his body was embalmed and put in a coffin in Egypt (v.^{26}); and after some centuries 'Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you.'[4] One of the Apostles has selected this dying 'commandment concerning his bones' from among all the incidents of Joseph's career as the outstanding proof of his faith.[5] Amid all his Egyptian achievements and successes he kept his heart humble and his faith simple. Egypt was the scene of his struggles and temptations, his honours and triumphs; it was the

[1] Emerson. [2] Professor Butcher. [3] Ps. 130^{6}.
[4] Ex. 13^{19}. [5] Heb. 11^{22}.

land of his adoption, in which he lived nearly a century, making history; but he never ceased to feel himself a stranger in it. The glamour of Egypt never withdrew his eyes from the glory of Canaan, and in his dying dreams he saw the land of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He never ceased to be a true Hebrew. Sometimes he affected to be more Egyptian than the Egyptians, —a diviner who swore by the life of Pharaoh—but this was no more than a light play on the surface of his mind. He spoke the Egyptian language, married an Egyptian wife, served an Egyptian king, but he was never Egyptianised. His heart was 'true to the kindred points of heaven and home'; and if he could not live in Canaan he was minded at least to sleep his last sleep in it. We feel that it is characteristic of him that his last recorded utterance contains the name of God (v.[25]). His ruling passion is strong in death. His loyalty to the God of Israel is the outstanding fact in his story. In the wealth of Egypt's commerce, in the magnificence of her temples, in the learning of her colleges, he saw nothing to make him swerve from his allegiance to the God whom he learned to love as a child. He maintained his detachment of spirit; he served his God with twice the zeal with which he served his king. 'It is easy in the world to live after the world's opinion; it is easy in solitude to live after our own; but the great man is he who in the midst of the crowd keeps with perfect sweetness the independence of solitude.'[1] Pure and gentle, noble and generous, high-minded and true-hearted, Joseph dies as he has lived, in faith. To think of him is to think of youth, beauty, and victorious strength, of temptations resisted, of God-given gifts well used and the crown of earthly glory won. The cities in which he lived and laboured have disappeared; the multitudes which filled the air with the hum of their voices and the din of their industries have melted away; and scarcely one stone of Memphis rests upon another. But his spirit lives on, his virtues and graces silently passing into the lives of others, and his story bearing fruit through all succeeding ages.

[1] Emerson.

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